



CURIOSITY



INEQUALITY
THE TOWERING REALITY

FEEDBACK ON *CURIOSITY* ISSUE 1

I deeply treasure the *CUriosity* you have made.

I like how the book reviews are highlighting the relevance of literary masterpieces. They emphasize how the books transcend space and time. I also truly appreciate your sophisticated assessment in such a delicate matter that potentially touches people's bottom line ethics and belief. I dare say that ten people may offer ten different answers to this question (animal research ethics) that you raised.

CUriosity is a product of love and intelligence. It brings forward the issues that concern this community and beyond.

The magazine was carefully edited and well-written. I like the large variety of articles in this issue of *CUriosity*. In particular, Mr Kitchens' article is especially inspiring for kids in Hong Kong. I am sure many students will find his career exciting.

I saw the journal and think you and your friends really did a very, very good job. The journal is very beautiful and sophisticated. It is more like a professional magazine than a student publication. I love it so much and keep a copy for myself as a record.

I was amazed and impressed by the quality of writing in *CUriosity*. I could feel and see that *CUriosity* was a product of blood, sweat, tears and most importantly love. It is admirable and exemplary that students can write such investigative feature stories. There is evidence of a lot of research, contemplation and reflection in the entire writing process for this magazine.

Overall the issue is demonstrably impressive as an (undergraduate) publication. It strongly manifests creativity, yet is produced professionally. Issue No. 1 Spring 2018 is clearly well integrated around its theme (health) and built with a nice diversity in its array of solid articles. It informs, inspires, and reassures for students (and all others)!

I really enjoyed the articles and appreciate how much work your team clearly put in. I thought the article about assisted suicide for mentally ill individuals was really interesting, and not a topic I'd considered before. I also really enjoyed hearing your thoughts about working with lab animals given your personal beliefs and background with rodent pets; it was balanced, interesting and well written.

The *CUriosity* magazine constitutes a remarkable service to CUHK students (and perhaps beyond) by (1) providing a new opportunity for students to not only read and reflect, but to also write and contribute to the community of learners that is a university; by (2) filling an important gap in the context of students publications; and by (3) showing the broader relevance of the topics discussed through the explicit connections to issues from the core General Education curriculum.

The articles are written with passion, yet include a level of scientific rigour that is rarely found in Hong Kong. I particularly enjoyed the first-hand account of the NASA space programme from a former employee.

A *Tale of Two Minds* article, in seeking to relate introversion and extroversion in individuals, is especially commendable and noteworthy. The writer very effectively illustrates and treats the importance of having "balance" between these two differing behavioral tendencies: socializing versus withdrawal (isolation). Individuals of both personality types should benefit from reading his words, as they are so highly relevant in the modern era of stress in life.

Overall, *CUriosity* is more like an enzyme than a product. It is not telling you the answers, but trigger your 'curiosity' in the surroundings.

A copy of your magazine arrived and I have to say that I am very impressed by the quality of the production. You and your team did a great job. Pushing a project as complex as this across the finish line must have caused a lot of headaches and lots of lost sleep. I hope the pleasure that comes from its completion is adequate reward.

I am reading your magazine.
It is soul soothing.

If you would like to enter for a chance to be a guest writer for our next issue, please respond to the prompt below (max 800 words) and send to: curiositycuhk@gmail.com.

*Have you ever felt the anguish of bearing an untold story in you?
Do not hesitate to write to us and express this unique story of yours!*

CUriosity issue 1 can be found at: http://www.bch.cuhk.edu.hk/curiosity/curiosity_issue1.pdf or QR code:



DEAR READER,

Issue 2 of *CURiosity* brings you a delectable serving of articles to feast on.

SOCIETY section: you will explore the implications of artificial intelligence, the ethics of gene editing and the devastation - and hope, that emerges from the darkness of domestic abuse.

PERSPECTIVE section: you will discover the value of self-love, the courage of sticking with a dream - and pushing it through to reality. You will also find yourself contemplating the meaning of love in the context of modern life amidst a group of drunken half-naked men at a very famous drinking party.

THEME section: In his essay *Why I Write*, George Orwell sets out four motives that drive him to commit pen to paper. One of them being the “desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people’s idea of the kind of society that they should strive after”. And thus is our mission for *CURiosity* Issue 2. We live in a world that is so interconnected that ignorance is no longer an excuse, and neither is inaction. This is why we chose **Inequality** as our theme for this issue; a topic that warrants an increasing need to be addressed given the rising gaps in health and wealth both within and between societies.

For many of us, life in Hong Kong is so abundant in commodities, so rapid in pace, and so focused on status and self image that it may cloud us from recognizing the decadence and decay such pursuits sometimes entail. For example, the materialistic satisfaction we feel on a shopping spree is not easily connected to the plight of an impoverished child in a decrepit household devastated by climate change-induced natural disasters, or the massive piles of floating plastic strewn across the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Yet this is the type of world we inhabit today; one in which the consequences of our actions are so downstream the complex chain of cause-and-effect that they’re almost negligible.

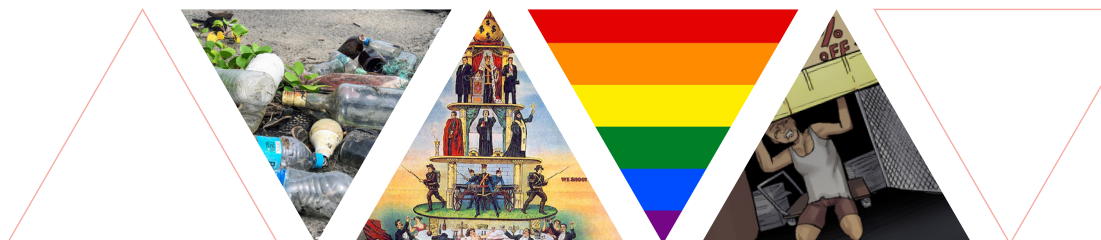
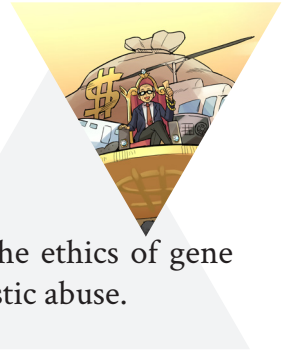
Almost.

Our choices and actions, because of its aggregate effect, is perhaps the most meaningful autonomy we have at our disposal to reduce the inequality in our world. How conscious we are of the cumulative outcome of our daily actions manifests in the choices we make that ensure mankind continues to strive for the values of goodness, compassion and equality that distinguishes humans as morally conscious individuals.

Yours truly,

Serena

Editor in Chief





SERENA
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Last summer, I was in Italy. After a few days in Florence, gazing out at the Arno river, I visited Pisa. There, I walked along a riverbank until I realized: it's the Arno again. As I followed the river, or the river followed me, I thought to myself...these waters have been here for thousands of years; we are just a transient moment in its eternal presence. One day, we will be gone, and it flows on. This sense of connectivity and continuity was a little sad, yet strangely comforting.

Everyone dies, and nothing speaks more to the value of a life than the richness of its experiences. Make it count.



EMILY
OPERATIONS
MANAGER

An inquisitive mind undefined by rules, space, and form, constantly seeking to expand horizon. Also an avid learner of all things in this universe, aspiring to be a better art aficionado, enophile, researcher, and medical student. For now, it's all about living a life of adventure and delight.



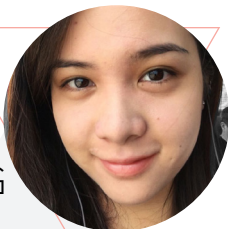
BERNARD
WRITER AND
WEB DESIGNER

Constantly exploring the world and a language enthusiast. Playing the piano and squash during my leisure time. Aspiring to become a more well-rounded computer scientist and putting what I have learnt into practice, making this world a better place. Recently falling in love with Bioinformatics.



TIFFANY
WRITER

An avid reader and keen learner. Insatiably curious. Passionate about all things science and art. Creative and artistic-ish. Sometimes jaded and sarcastic. Committed to close friends. A cat lover. A discophile wanna-be. A clinophile with no shame.



LOK PING
WRITER

Love reading biographies of great people who made personal compromises for the public good as a reminder that there is still good in a miserable world full of hypocrites who can't stand the temptations of fame and money.



MICHAEL
GRAPHICS
DESIGNER

A person should not be defined by his or her bio; a good designer should write less to save space.



YUNG
ILLUSTRATOR

Love drawing because it is one of the important parts of my life. Drawing comics during leisure time in order to improve my drawing skills and relax. Hope you will enjoy my illustration!



ISIS
EDITOR

Isis is a student of the humanities, desperately doggy-paddling in the deep, swift waters of medicine. 90% of pictures in her phone are of her five cats. She once wrote a story every day for a year and now she can barely write a bio, so that's how far she's fallen...

MEET
THE
TEAM



DHAVNI

GUEST WRITER

Born and brought up in India. Reader, writer and painter.
Have a knack for social organisation, argumentation and communicative media.
Curious, collaborative, empathetic and ambiverted.
Personal Interests: Dogs, languages, cultural history, asexuality, alternative healing, indigenous arts and dance.
Strengths: High emotional stamina, quick learner, very adaptive.
Admires: Humor, intellect, tolerance.
Academic interests: Cell biology, gene editing, immunobiology.



KATHY

GUEST WRITER

A mathematics student and a firm believer that the world is quantifiable. I'm wondering how chemicals and currents work in the brain and how tangible brains form intangible consciousness. Is there a mathematical model that well represents brain activities? This is my lifelong question.



CRYSTAL

GUEST WRITER

Just a girl who loves to daydream and fantasize about stories that she will never write. Not that she doesn't want to – publishing a book has long been on her bucket list, it's just that life is too suffocating at the moment. Even so, she finds joy in watching dramas, going to cafés with friends and singing in the shower.



PHOEBE

GUEST WRITER

The Social Queen with an introverted heart. I love medicine and sciences for my life was saved by the two. Spent the last 20 years chasing after my dream and is still on this journey. Hope to be inspired as I believe "Confidence empowers, Insecurity competes".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The *CUriosity* team extends their sincere appreciation to the General Education Foundation for their full support and funding of our publication. We also wish to thank the following people, who provided valuable feedback that enhanced the content and quality of our writing:

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Mr. Philip Kitchens (Guest Writer for *CUriosity* Issue 1)
Dr. Tjonnie Li (Department of Physics)
Dr. Wai Yin Ng (Centre for Learning Enhancement and Research)
Dr. Jacky Ngo (School of Life Sciences)
Mr. Mike See (English Language Teaching Unit)

Finally, our warmest gratitude to Dr. Isabel Hwang (Faculty of Medicine), our supervisor, whose insightful and candid comments both encouraged and challenged us to think, to write, and to think like a writer.



DR. ISABEL
HWANG

SUPERVISOR

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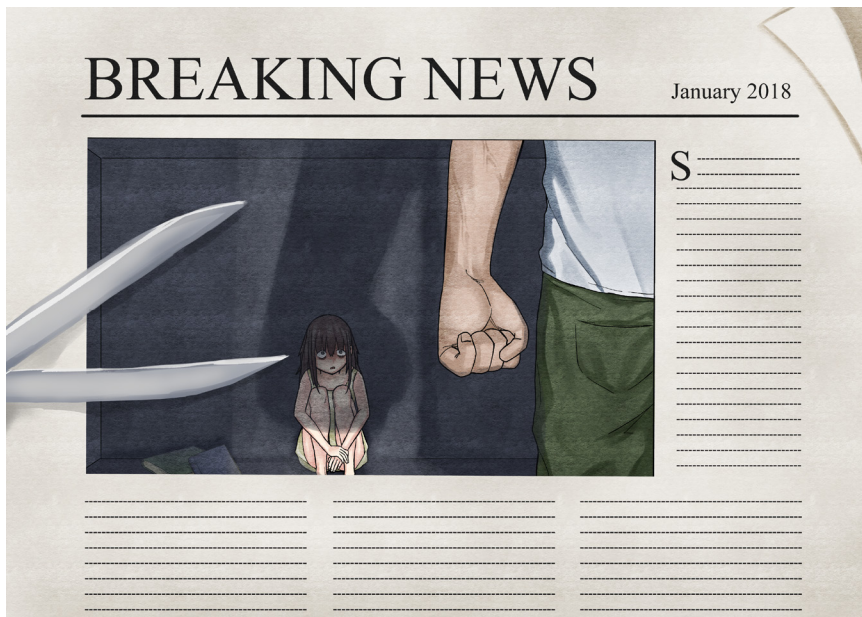
TO LIVE IN FEAR

AND FEAR IN LOVE

The Stifled Cries of Child Abuse Victims

By Crystal

Illustrations by Yung



caused by abuse in childhood come to an end once their abuser is arrested?

Before we answer this question, let us look at three statements about child abuse and guess if they are true or false.

TOO LATE TO TURN BACK?

1. Child abuse do not bring permanent consequences to the physical and psychological well-being of the child.

TRUE OR FALSE?

For those who successfully escape from their abuser, are they really free? Visible bruises clear up eventually; invisible scars last for a lifetime. Sometimes, a child who has been physically and psychologically abused can never fully recover.

A case in Los Angeles in 1970 illustrates the irreversible effects of child abuse. The girl, named Genie to protect her identity, was discovered in a small locked room, tied naked to a potty chair. No one had ever uttered a single word to her throughout her decade of isolation.

Scissors, chest, ceiling, death. murder.

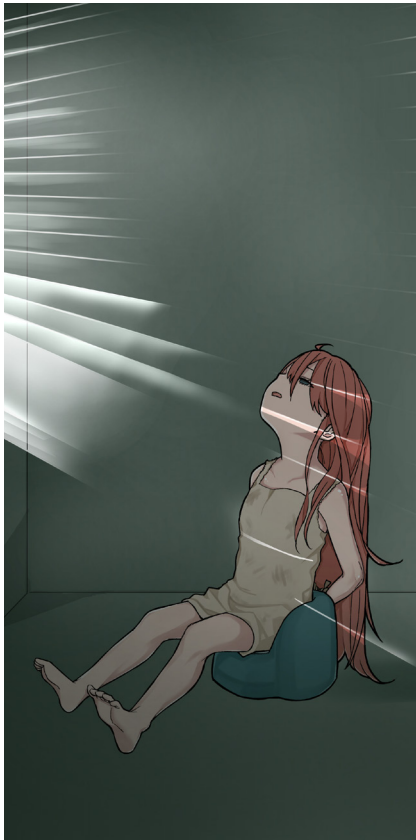
THESE keywords appeared in a local newspaper in early January 2018. The victim was a five-year-old girl while the abusers were, tragically, her parents. The girl died upon arrival at the hospital. Try linking up the words to guess what happened.

Brace yourself for the grotesque answer.

Her parents were reported to have poked the girl on the chest with scissors and hurled her repeatedly up towards the ceiling. She, along with her eight-year-old brother, was often starved and neglected. In the end, the parents were charged with

This was only one of the many child abuse cases in Hong Kong. According to the Social Welfare Department, there have been at least 500 cases of child abuse reported from January to June 2018. More than half of the abusers (67.3%) are parents.

Yet, the newspaper articles and government statistics merely show an overview of the incident. Often, they neglect to include a follow-up story on the victims – the lingering trauma of abuse on their physical and psychological health, how the victims feel towards their abuser, and how they adapt to social life afterwards. In fact, do the nightmares



The rehabilitation team described her as “the most profoundly damaged child” they had ever seen. After months of recovery, Genie could pick up some daily life skills, such as getting dressed and using the toilet, but one thing remained stagnant – her language abilities. Genie was never able to learn the grammatical rules of a language and converse normally because –

It was too late.

The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) singles out age as a defining factor in language acquisition. First proposed by neurologists Penfield and Roberts in *Speech and Brain Mechanisms* (1959), the CPH suggests the optimal period for language learning ends at 12 years old. Once the critical period has passed, language acquisition becomes incredibly difficult for children like Genie. Consequently, contrary to what we expect, there can be no going back for some child abuse victims.

DEVELOPING ATTACHMENT ISSUES

2. Victims of child abuse are often willing to testify against their abusive parents.

TRUE OR FALSE?

News of child abuse often cause an uproar in society, especially when the offenders turn out to be parents. As prosecutors try to get the offenders convicted, everyone just assumes we are doing the victims a huge favour.

However, it is more complicated than we think.

There was a case in Castle Rock, a city in Cowlitz County, Washington in 2013. A father was on trial for choking his wife and whipping his son with a pistol. His wife and children served as key witnesses to the case. To everyone's shock, his wife and children refused to turn up at court to ‘protect’ their father and husband from being sent to prison for 20 years. Ultimately, the father posted bail and was freed from custody while his wife and son were jailed for refusal to testify.



Sometimes, the victims even invent explanations for their injuries so as not to create trouble for their family members.

Another case happened in Hong Kong recently. The seven-year-old Suki is a child abuse victim in Hong Kong. Currently, she is in Persistent Vegetative State and the doctors claim she will not live past 20 years old. As reporters dug deeper into Suki's story, they realized Suki had once designed a heartfelt card that said, “I love you, Mum and Dad”.

If there were no visible bruises and the child writes a lovely card dedicated to her parents, would we suspect anything?

A question is thus proposed: *Why do abused children often remain attached to their abusive parents?*

The answer can be traced back to the minute a child is born. An infant is highly sensitive to sounds. As he familiarizes with his mother's voice and odours, a bond is formed. Newborn rats are used to illustrate how the “mother's odour” is preferred, even when it comes along with negative stimuli such as shocks or tail pinching. This extends to infants who form attachments with their mother despite being abused.

Due to this “maternal attachment”, psychologist Mary Ainsworth came up with the Strange Situation Test to detect psychological abuse.

The Strange Situation Test determines if a child has “secure” or “disorganized” attachment. In the test, the mother leaves the room. A stranger goes into the room and interacts with the child. Then, the mother returns.

At first, all children are unwilling to separate from their mother. However, when the mother returns, children with disorganized attachment begin to show signs of fear and reluctance towards her, such as pulling away and curling up in a ball to isolate oneself. These abnormal signs thus suggest the inner struggle of the abused children.

Some adoptive parents are even forced to send the child back to social services when things go out of hand. The programme interviewed another parent called Rob, who lamented their decision to give up their adopted four-year-old child. Despite doing their best to love the child, Rob and his wife had to constantly put up with the child's

for the FBI. In the book, he stated:

“There is no such thing as a person, who at age 35 suddenly changes from perfectly normal into totally evil, disruptive, murderous behaviour. The behaviours that are precursors to murder have been present and developing in that person's life for a long, long time - since childhood ”



ARE MONSTERS BORN OR MADE?

3. Victims of child abuse may develop violent behaviours and are easily socially rejected.

TRUE OR FALSE?

For adoptive parents, children that have once been abused can be hard to deal with.

BBC's Victoria Derbyshire programme interviewed an adoptive parent called Diane, whose child had been abused and neglected since birth. Diane expressed concern over her daughter's "clingy" needs as her daughter would even "put a finger up her nose to make it bleed" to demand Diane's full attention.

violent outbursts such as kicking and punching. Rob's wife even had bruises all over her body.

It is not rare for victims to be diagnosed with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Having experienced rejection from their birth parents, the children are afraid that the love they receive from their adoptive parents will not last. Therefore, they must either become the center of their adoptive parents' world or they will become hostile towards their kindness. The love and attachment of abused children towards their caregivers is certainly confusing and heartbreaking at the same time.

The violence observed in child victims can proceed to adulthood. Robert Ressler, a retired FBI agent and ex-army Criminal Investigation Division colonel, wrote a book called *Whoever Fights Monsters: My Twenty Years Tracking Serial Killers*

This suggests a tendency for child abuse victims to turn into serial killers and psychopaths and become monsters that everyone despises and fears. However, no one is born as a monster. One of the ways to prevent someone from becoming a monster is to show them care. How can we show that we understand the plight of these victims and are willing to help them?





Advertisement by ANAR that shows a different message for adults and children

TO SEE AND BE SEEN

To gain the victims' trust, we must first see from their point of view. A Spanish organization – Aid to Children and Adolescents at Risk Foundation (ANAR) – designed an advertisement that perfectly illustrates how we can let the victims know that we stand by their side.

Unlike traditional advertisements, this one appeals to children with a secretive message. Only a child who is around four feet tall will see the bruises on the victim as well as the message, “*If somebody hurts you, phone us and we’ll help you.*” Adults are oblivious of this private exchange, thus encourage children to cry for help.

BEFORE WE JUDGE

When we consider child abuse, we picture violence: hitting, spanking, or throwing things. Nonetheless, child abuse is not just about inflicting physical pain upon the child, but also the lack of security that comes along with neglect. Neglect occurs when the parent fails to provide basic needs for the child, be it food, hygiene or clothes.

When the person who is supposed to love and care for you turns

out to be cold, distant, and fails to provide you with necessities such as food, it makes sense that you will grow up with trust and commitment issues.

You may think it is not up to you to reach out to these victims. It’s the job of the government, psychologists, educators, or big companies to enact largescale changes. However, it’s the little things that count. If you see someone acting abnormal and having unexplained bruises, show your care and turn to a professional if needed; if you see someone refusing to reach out to the

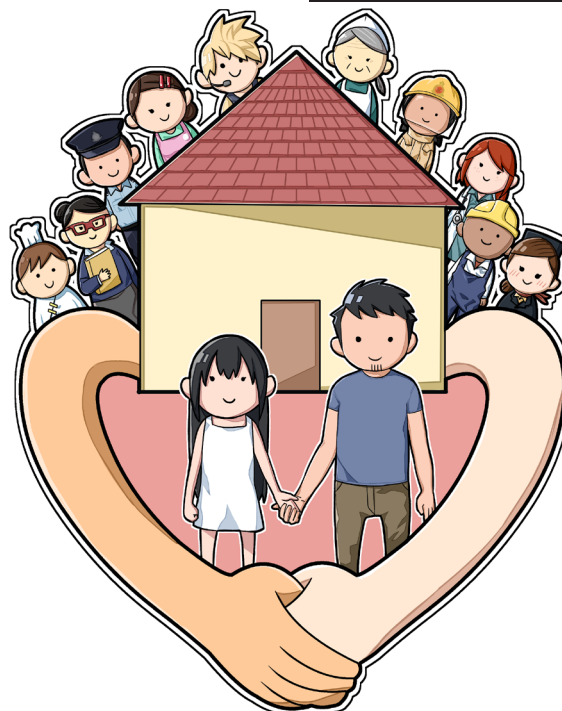
authorities, consider their point of view instead of forcing them to do anything; if you see someone being socially rejected due to their withdrawn personality, be the first one to accept and approach them. There is so much that you can do. Never underestimate the little things that can become big important things.

Albert Einstein once said, “The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don’t do anything about it.” Evil can be inevitable, but whether we act to fight against it is our choice. Now that you understand more about the victims, you should do your part in helping them heal.

The damage caused by abuse does not end when the abusers are caught, it ends when the victims are accepted and supported by society. A happy ending for them will be to step away from fear and live in love – and it starts with you.

Answers to the quiz:

1.F 2.F 3.T



From Mathematics to “Conscious” Machine

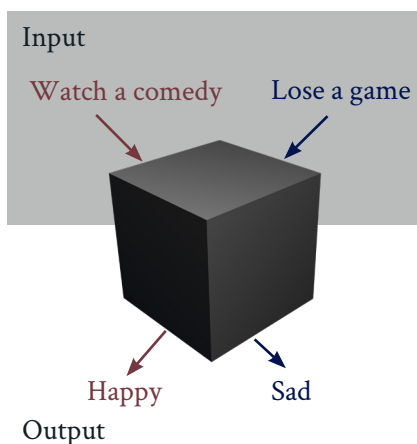
A Preliminary Idea of Modelling
Brain Activities Using Stochastic
Differential Equations

By Kathy



Can machines be conscious? Probably most of you will answer, “No.” Recently, a humanoid robot named Sophia became a hype for her high-quality conversations with human beings in interviews. The crazier thing is that Saudi Arabia granted her a citizenship, giving her the same rights as other human beings. Nevertheless, people cannot accept Sophia as an equal being as us, arguing that all her actions and reactions result from set algorithms designed by the inventors, but she herself is not truly conscious of what she is doing.

The Oxford English Dictionary says consciousness, arising from the mind, means awareness of oneself as well as of the surroundings. But what is awareness? According to the dictionary, it means perception, while perception indicates awareness. The definition of consciousness is indeed very vague. However, one thing is for sure: consciousness arises from the mind. Regardless of what the mind is and whether it is tangible or not, it functions like a black box, receiving messages, and outputting ideas. Up to now, only creatures like humans are believed to have such a “conscious” mind, but scientists who always want to push the material world beyond its limit are dreaming of building a machine that could be as “conscious” as humans.



Mind is like a black box

“Consciousness” as a Result of Brain Activities

Then, what is a mind? For thousands of years, people had believed that the mind is immaterial and could not be studied scientifically. Many ancient philosophers such as Plato and René Descartes as well as religionists contended that the mind is superior to the bodies. They were not able to find any link between the intangible mind and the solid world due to limits of science and technology, and denied the idea that the

tion stored in the neuron. Studying a “conscious” mind is equivalent to studying the brain, so we can define “consciousness” or the degree of “consciousness” by comparing with humans’ brains. In this sense, Sophia still cannot be viewed as “conscious”. When a healthy person is slapped in the face, s/he will be “conscious” of the pain, but Sophia probably cannot feel the pain, for s/he is not equipped with the “neuron” that senses pain, while many creatures can feel pain naturally. In addition to her built-in inability to be “conscious”, whether she can learn to be “conscious” is in doubt. We know that Sophia can get

Mind-Body Duality

The mind is separated from the body



Mind-Body Unity

The mind arises from brain activities



mind is the result of body functioning, so it would be absurd to think of inventing something intangible using any materials in the world.

With the development of biology in the past century, it has been found that a “conscious” mind is indeed the result of the activities of the brain and neurons that extend to the whole body. For example, memories are indeed newly developed neurons within one’s brain, so being conscious of a past memory is merely a recruitment of informa-

tion involved in a free conversation with human beings, but from the video of the conversation, her responses were limited, and she did not seem to understand metaphors. Human babies cannot understand metaphors either, but through learning, one can acquire the knowledge. And there are a lot more types of “consciousness” that Sophia has not obtained. In this sense, Sophia is nowhere as “conscious” as humans. Actually, no machines can emulate the brain nowadays, for the mechanism of it is very obscure.

Brain Activities Based on Mathematics

In order to build a “conscious” machine, it is essential to understand the mechanism of the brain. Then one can copy it to generate “consciousness”. James Watson concluded that “life is nothing but a matter of physics and chemistry”. Indeed, brain activities strictly follow the principle of physics and chemistry. Furthermore, the logic behind physics and chemistry is mathematical. Therefore, I would like to explore “consciousness” from the perspective of mathematics.

Although the mechanism of the brain is still in exploration, we have obtained some initial results and come up with some hypotheses. In this situation, stochastic differential equations (SDEs) can be a good model of brain activities, for it combines known results and unexplained observations.

Brain Activities Modelled by Stochastic Differential Equations (SDEs)

If the brain is merely a matter of physics and chemistry, we can apply differential equations to modelling brain activities as physicists and chemists usually do to physical motions and chemical reactions. For example, electrical circuits, chemicals movements, and heat diffusion after chemical reactions can all be modelled by differential equations. What makes a differential equation powerful is that the result is deterministic once the initial and the boundary conditions are given. For instance, if we solve a differential equation representing a stimulus to the brain, given the strength of the stimulus (i.e., the initial condition),

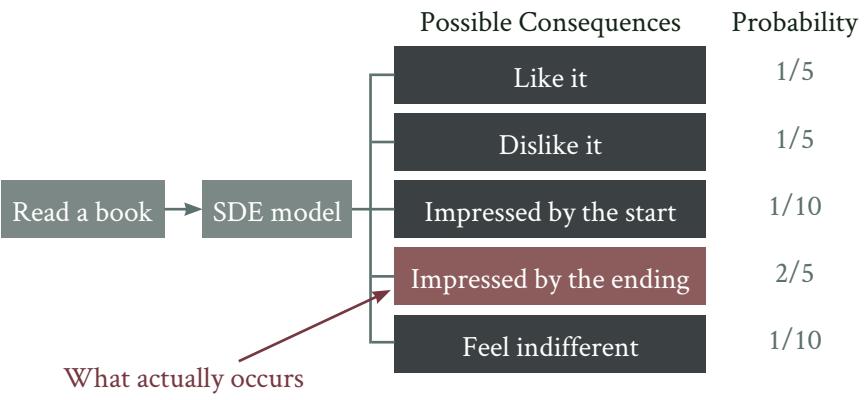
the length of the neuron (i.e., the boundary condition), etc., we can predict the consequence without actually doing an experiment.

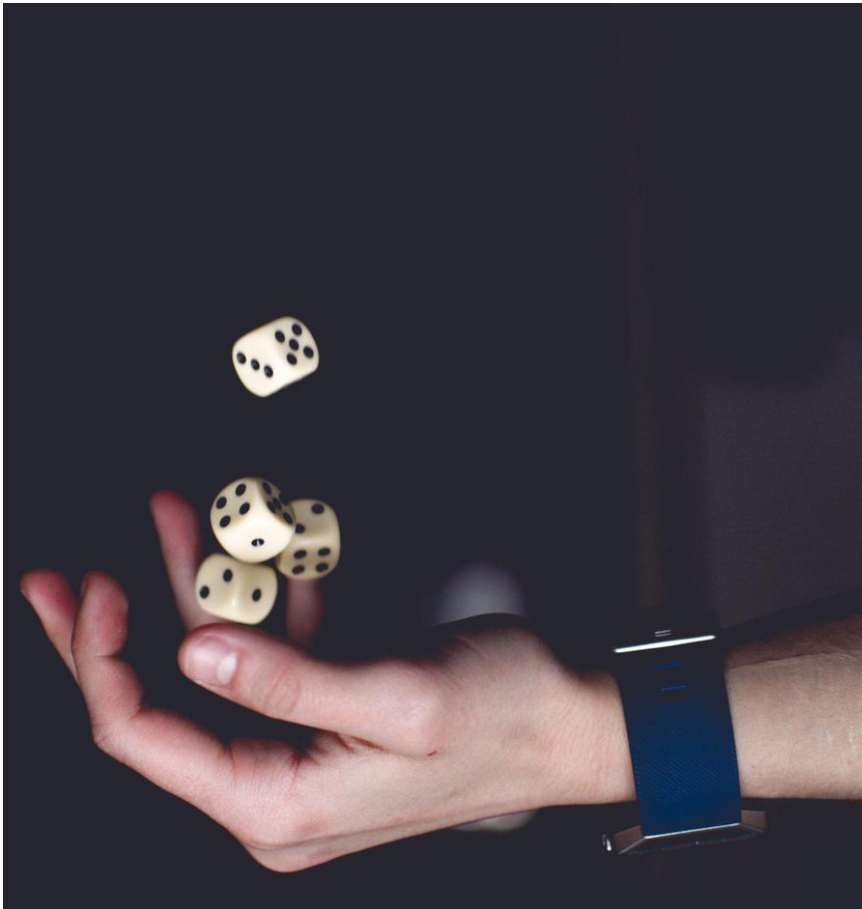
Nevertheless, human beings usually behave in unpredictable ways, so deterministic models are inaccurate. Hence, a stochastic differential equation (SDE) is required to model brain activities. “Stochastic” here means indeterministic. In SDEs, the deterministic characteristics of classical differential equations are preserved, but stochastic processes are added for more complex activities that a deterministic model cannot explain.

I came across stochastic differential equations (SDE) in my financial mathematics class. In 1973, Fischer Black and Myron Scholes derived a famous pricing formula for some financial products from stochastic differential equations. I find the formula fascinating because it describes both a comprehensible trend and unpredictable fluctuations of the financial market. Since the market is simply a representation of a collection of human decisions, which are by nature a series of brain activities, it is reasonable to consider applying the financial model to an individual brain.

A Deterministic or Indeterministic Brain?

In SDEs, one can view the result of brain activities as a random distribution. That is, there can be numerous possible results of a series of brain activities, each endowed with a certain probability summing up to one, but each time only one specific result can occur. For instance, when someone reads the same book several times, he/she might have different reflections and find something new from the book. Also, as said in the Chinese sayings, there are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand readers’ minds. People may argue that these two examples cannot well explain that brain activities are indeterministic because everyone has different life experiences and physical conditions, which may result in distinct initial conditions and boundary conditions for the same deterministic differential equation model. Even for the same person, each time when s/he does the same thing, there is a time lag during which something may happen within the brain that stimulates new ideas. Therefore, it is possible that there is nothing indeterministic in one’s brain; all the different reactions are merely results of slight changes of parameters of the same deterministic model. I really appreciate this argument. The nature is so subtle that a slight change that human beings cannot sense may generate a catastrophic storm as described in the butterfly effect.





Credits to Fotografierende at www.pexels.com

Are brain activities intrinsically stochastic? Or are they indeed deterministic, but produce seemingly random results due to the environment? We don't know the answer yet. However, we can still apply a stochastic model to approximate brain activities. Indeed, the studies of probability is predicting anything that one is not 100% sure of. Let's take a simple example. When we roll a die, we have the same probability of obtaining each side facing upward. We do not need to know whether obtaining a different side is due to randomness of the world or due to a slight change in the strength of our hands or in the wind speed, but numerous experiments tell us the probability is correct. Even if we already know that an event is deterministic, we can still use the theory of probability to describe its behaviour. For instance, Monte Carlo simulation is a popular method

to obtain a sequence of random numbers between 0 and 1. If you take a close look at the method, you will find that only the first number chosen is random, while all the followings are dependent on the first number. However, we still use it to obtain random numbers because it is a good approximation, just as Newton's three laws of motions, though already proved wrong, are still significant in physics because it is a good approximation of the real world. Likewise, we do not need that the brain literally functions randomly. As long as there is a random distribution that can properly predict brain activities, it is a good model.

SDEs are already being used in neuroscience, especially in studying complex brain activities. Scientists find that there are sometimes a burst of activities called a neuronal avalanche in neuronal networks in an

extremely short period of time separated by relatively quiescent states. The reason for a neuronal avalanche is unknown, but by observation, its size can be modelled by a random distribution, so SDEs can be applied in the research. This is only a tip of an iceberg in the application of SDEs to modelling brain activities. Maybe the brain is operating deterministically, but if we could construct a probability distribution to approximate brain activities properly, we will be one step closer to modelling consciousness artificially by generating the corresponding random samples.'

Conclusion

There is a long way to build a "conscious" machine. If we can to a large extent predict "consciousness", or brain activities, we already take a big step toward success. Knowledge of brain activities is essential for the prediction, while most of the activities are unexplained. Thus, SDEs serve as a good model in that it not only models the understood brain activities, but also predicts unexplained ones based on observations.

UGFN Box: Eric R. Kandel's *In Search of Memory*

The study of the mind spans various fields throughout history, from philosophy and theology to biology, and in the end to physics and chemistry. Nowadays, mathematicians get involved in neuroscience as well, especially in model building, and computer scientists are trying to use the results in neuroscience to build artificial intelligence (AI). Can a real AI be created by modelling the mind mathematically?

HEALTH. PRIVACY. BELIEF.

ETHICS OF GENE EDITING

Written and
Illustrated by
Dhvanii

“Would you change the genes of your child?”

This is a question we do not come across often enough, but it was precisely what a friend very casually asked me one day. As a student of science, I'd say that I did not have a very satisfactory answer — and thinking about how intimately genetic sciences and technologies would affect us in the near future, I was at the very least, intimidated.



The Synthetic Age: Future of Gene Editing Technologies

I recently had the wonderful opportunity of attending a talk by Professor Jennifer A. Doudna, a leading geneticist in the **CRISPR** gene-editing technology, at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. In her words, “Gene editing is much like cut and paste in a word-processing document.” We can snip off a piece of faulty DNA and replace it with the functioning gene. This sophisticated technology is not just exclusive to labs and scientists but now available to ordinary citizens, sometimes through biohackers, as self-injecting CRISPR kits.

Such loose access to these inventions has sparked debates about the rapid advancement in gene editing technology. Other than that, privacy and ethical concerns of gene editing have also been raised by socio-cultural groups, industries, academia and even the general public. These are some issues I would like to address in this article, to integratively discuss how our society can strike a balance between protecting people's rights while making scientific progress.

A Disease-Free Society

May 2018- “The ethical, legal, and social implications panel at the Biology of Genomes meeting discussed how advances in somatic DNA editing could lead to germline editing, and how this possibility is raising safety, consent, ethical and equity concerns.” (*GenomeWeb*)

Germline editing can help pass genetic alterations to progeny. This means we are capable of changing the genetic makeup of an embryo, an unborn child. This treatment could prevent parents from passing on dangerous genes that cause life threatening diseases, such as cancer,

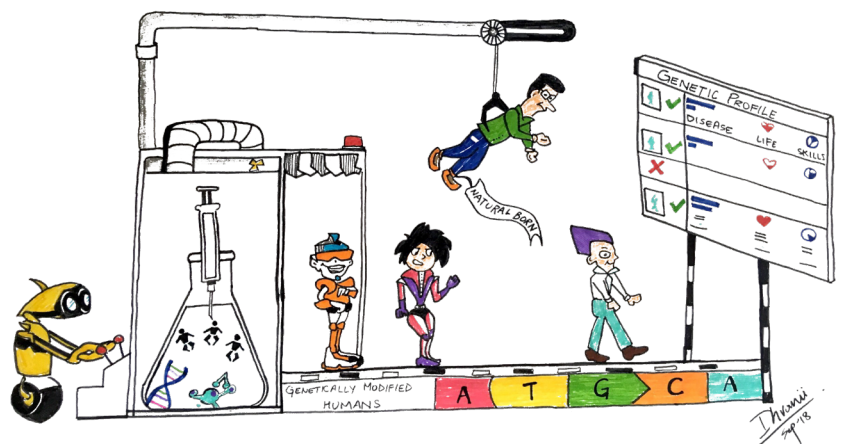
to their children. However, unequal uptake of such gene-based treatments, coupled with socio economic differences, could lead to discriminatory practices in the society.

During the times of Nazi Germany and the years after the World War II, policies based on negative eugenics — wherein the ‘undesirable population’ was forcefully sterilized to ‘improve’ the quality of the citizens — constituted one of the worst human-rights violations in history. Though these policies were ultimately overturned, the idea of positive eugenics (which promotes reproduction in the population with desirable traits) has continued to thrive in various parts of the world.

A hypothesis by Paul S. Knoepfler, an American biologist, piqued my interest. In his TED Talk — “The ethical dilemma of designer babies” — he suggested that the era of coexistence between ‘natural born’ and ‘genetically modified’ humans could arrive as soon as the coming decade.

telligent or healthier than you, they are less likely to develop genetic diseases and more likely to live longer. Living in such a society as a natural-born would subject one to excruciating competition and systematic discrimination. If this sounds like it is only possible in a science fiction movie, think again — because this is a very possible outcome of our current scientific and societal progress.

I do appreciate the well intentioned motives of such a system and the benefits of techniques like germline editing, CRISPR and carrier screening (which tests individuals for **heterozygosity** of genes that may potentially produce disorders in **homozygous** state). But, genetic enhancements that start with a nobler approach, such as in cancer treatments, a simple codon replacement to treat **sickle cell anaemia**, or a breakthrough in the form of the first Alzheimer-risk free baby, can quickly turn into the whims of our vanity. They are likely to make things like bioelectronic cognitive



THE SUPERHUMANS: Competition between Natural born and Genetically modified humans

To illustrate this dilemma, let us consider the possibility of living in an era where certain individuals, born as ‘Designer babies’ have a superior biological makeup and some important genetic advantages. These genetically-modified humans are not just better looking, more in-

enhancements or extending human lifespan a reality.

However, it is not my intention to impede those who can afford the advancements of science for their benefits, nor to suggest how laws should control them. What I want

to highlight here is my insight into what we, as responsible adults, can do to help shape each other's thoughts about these yet-to-be-defined ethics.

Genetic Surveillance



June 2018- “DNA testing companies 23andMe and MyHeritage offered to help connect missing children at the U.S.-Mexico border to their parents, but American immigration groups fear that they could do more harm than good.” (Fast Company)

Individual decisions to make one's sequenced genome available for research and analysis is a perfectly rational stance, however somebody's genomic information going public without their consent cannot be neglected. In recent months, American DNA testing companies have made free DNA testing kits available in an effort to locate families of separated immigrant children. Though the gesture is generous, it has urged civil rights groups to question the potential risks of DNA testing, namely the breach of privacy of already vulnerable immigrant families. There is also a lot of discussion on the potential usage of this genetic information by employers in recruitment decisions or by insurance companies to screen their new customers. Similarly, gene-based medicines and treatments require DNA records which can be compromised through a simple data breach.

Such information can be at risk and used for secondary purposes such as criminal justice and extended medical research.

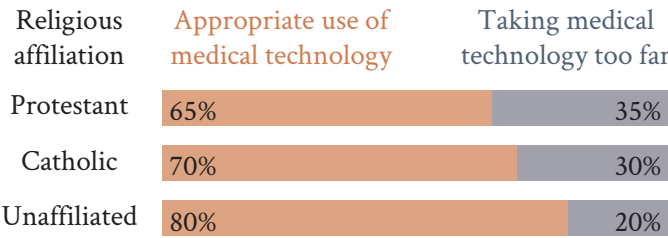
On the other hand, there are complaints about gene editing on another moral ground. If we believe strongly about people's rights to attain the highest health standards, it is also worth considering the rights of unborn humans. In an interview, author and science journalist Carl Zimmer discusses the possibility of children questioning their parents about inaction over their known faulty genomes in the future. This could be similar to 'wrongful birth' lawsuits, where children have sued parents for allowing them to be born with congenital diseases since their right to live a healthy life, free of suffering, is knowingly infringed upon. In such cases, the doctors are certainly liable to inform the parents, however the ultimate responsibility lies on the couple who brings the child to the world knowing that it's health has been compromised.

The Moment Of Truth

July 2018- “Studies by Pew show how high levels of religious commitment in Christians made it less likely for people to approve gene editing for treating diseases at birth or over lifetime.” (Christianity Today)

Religious views and cultural ethos can be factors that affect social acceptance of gene-based medicines too. I happened to have chanced upon a study, detailing the transfer of medical knowledge in ancient India and China through the Silk Route. I was fascinated to learn that Buddhist records from the Tang dynasty revealed how surgical techniques and anatomical knowledge shared by Indian medicine were not initially accepted by the Confucian believers who firmly 'rejected any form of mutilation of the human body'. Relating to this interlinked heritage, I began wondering why gene editing treatments, like the ancient Indian medical practices, would be rejected. As it turns out, it is harder to use gene-editing procedures once the patient has been born; mistakes are more common in post-birth treatments of genetic diseases. Therefore, like the Confucians of Tang dynasty, patients with genetic diseases nowadays may be apprehensive to engage in potentially "mutilating" procedures.

However, many families of patients suffering from terminal diseases have volunteered for current treatment trials in hopes of successful recovery. For some, they are simply a last-ditch effort to cure their loved ones. For others, the trials are a hopeful path towards better treatments in the future. Recently, there have been impressive developments in gene based targeted treatments against **Rheumatism**. As some-



Public Views of Gene Editing for Babies Depend on How It Would Be Used
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 23-May 6, 2018. PEW RESEARCH CENTER

one who has been diagnosed with this autoimmune disorder, I would like to keep my hopes high for the discovery of a cure for this disease through advancements in gene based therapies in the near future.

Editing fatal genes, diagnosing inherited disorders, and treating patients suffering from deadly inborn diseases saves lives in this increasingly genomically integrated world. However, as illustrated above, the dilemmas related to gene editing go well beyond the scientific realm — there are questions raised by this technology that relate to personal rights and to the society as a whole. Therefore, it is important that ethical frameworks, structured by law and convention, are instituted as soon as possible and people are made aware about the validity of such treatments and given family guidance through genetic counselling. Thus, these insights into our responsibilities as future adults can help us decide if we would want to change the genes of our children.

UGFN Box:

James D. Watson's
DNA: The Secret of Life

Darwin's "struggle for existence" emphasises the natural advantages in species for survival. With gene editing techniques on the rise, such genetic advantages are no longer going to be natural, that is, we will be synthesizing variations and creating enhanced organisms. But, what determines who wins the struggle for existence? Giving a genetic edge doesn't necessarily need to be a threat to equal opportunity. It could be seen as any other scientific advancement which requires as much patrolling on ethical grounds as any other societal progress.

Glossary

- 1 **CRISPR**
(Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats)
A segment of genetic material found in the genomes of prokaryotes that consists of repeated short sequences of nucleotides interspersed at regular intervals between unique sequennucleotides derived from the DNA of pathogens such as viruses) which had previously ied the bacteria and that functions to protect the bacteria against future infection by the same pathogens.
Here, it refers to a gene editing technique in which CRISPR and the RNA segments and enzymes it produces are used to identify and modify specific DNA sequences in the genome of other organisms. (Ref: Merriam-Webster)
- 2 **Germline editing**
Human germline modification means deliberately changing the genes passed on to children and future generations – in other words, creating genetically modified people. Human germline modification has for many years been widely considered off-limits, for both safety and social reasons. It is formally prohibited in more than 40 countries. (Ref: Centre for genetics and society)
- 3 **Heterozygosity**
The condition of being heterozygous, i.e. having the two alleles at corresponding loci on homologous chromosomes different for one or more loci. (Ref: Merriam-Webster)
- 4 **Homozygous**
Having two of the same form of gene (part of a cell containing DNA information) that controls a particular characteristic and is therefore able to pass on that form only. (Ref: Merriam-Webster)
- 5 **Sickle Cell Anemia**
Sickle cell disease is a group of disorders that affects hemoglobin. People with this disorder have atypical hemoglobin molecules called hemoglobin S, which can distort red blood cells into a sickle shape. (Ref: USA.gov)
- 6 **Rheumatism**
Any of various conditions characterized by inflammation or pain in muscles, joints, or fibrous tissue. (Ref: Merriam-Webster)



Some geneticists hope to bring back extinct species such as woolly mammoth by mixing their genes into existing animals and rescuing endangered species like Tasmanian Devil (NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC)



THE STORY OF ONE FAMILY WHO REFUSED TO TURN
AWAY FROM THE HARDSHIP THEY WITNESSED IN SOCIETY

BY MR. DAVID BEGBIE

Our world is not okay.

Almost 3 billion people survive on less than \$2.5 USD per day. 68.5+ million people are displaced. Tuberculosis and HIV are still wreaking unnecessary havoc across this planet. And environmental damage is spiralling dangerously out of control.

But can we? By way of an answer, let me share a story:

My family travelled throughout my childhood. We saw many beautiful parts of this world, but we saw much need as well. Our hearts wrestled with how to respond. At the beginning, we did all we knew how to do: we offered coins, a sandwich, or a few words of comfort. Somehow it did not feel enough. Soon though, the scale of human need we wit-

nessed grew so great that our own hearts demanded we do more, but we still didn't know how to respond, so we asked charities, "How can we help you?". Their answer to us was liberating. "Be *you*," they said. "We don't have people with your skills and talents. Be *you*... and use your skills to help us serve those in need."

So we did, joyfully. We offered our skills and talents, as we were able, until one night the phone rang. A charity we had assisted called, saying that their region in Northern China had just been hit by the worst flood in 100 years. 2 million people were displaced. Their question to us:

In an era where actions should be gigantic, bold and brave, they are too often tepid, inconsequential and small. Yet they need not be!



Faces of poverty - the ones Crossroads are committed to serving throughout the world.

In an era where actions should be gigantic, bold and brave, they are too often tepid, inconsequential and small. Yet they need not be! There is a lie in our world, a pervasive lie, which says, 'No, no you can't. You are too small.' Those words are destructive when said to us by people we trust, but they are dangerous when reiterated and believed by our own hearts.

Nowhere does the ramification of that lie have greater impact than in our response to world need. If there were ever an era to stand up for things that are right, needed and good, it should be this one.

any people in need?" Her counterpart didn't, but we did - 2 million, in fact. From this initial collection of 19 boxes, a school then offered 72, a company 136, another 248, and soon it was like a hole opened in the heavens, with resources flooding in. We registered as an NGO, and called it Crossroads. Only in retrospect did we realise that Hong Kong, where we were based, had no thriving second-hand culture. Resources were being thrown away into landfills, when they could have been saving lives. Soon our storeroom could no longer hold the volume, so the government graciously let us move into Hong Kong's old airport, before re-

any people in need?" Her counterpart didn't, but we did - 2 million, in fact. From this initial collection of 19 boxes, a school then offered 72, a company 136, another 248, and soon it was like a hole opened in the heavens, with resources flooding in. We registered as an NGO, and called it Crossroads. Only in retrospect did we realise that Hong Kong, where we were based, had no thriving second-hand culture. Resources were being thrown away into landfills, when they could have been saving lives. Soon our storeroom could no longer hold the volume, so the government graciously let us move into Hong Kong's old airport, before re-

locating us to a former army base, from which we continued to serve both the Hong Kong community, and the world.

with the key skills needed to help bring this platform into being and grow it to the point where we assisted the UN in building their own

in slums, doing activities reflecting a tiny bit of what life was like for those we serve every single day.

Instead of turning and running, these CEOs asked us to offer more events, so their staff could understand the changes they had felt in their own hearts. Principals began to bring teachers, teachers brought students, and then the needs of the world demanded we expand. They said that poverty was just one issue; what about refugees, HIV, blindness, disaster, and the environment?

It was at this point that the United Nations called us again. Every year, Switzerland hosts a meeting called the World Economic Forum and there was no way, the UN said, that they could bring all these world leaders to see refugee camps and empathise with their desperate situation. There was, however, a way we could bring the message to them. They asked if Crossroads could bring our refugee simulation to Switzerland to run it for these world leaders. We thought we had misheard their request, as our programme, reflecting reality, utilises soldiers, guns, barbed-wire, tents and landmines. We hadn't misheard, however, and soon had built this simulation right beside these world leaders' conference hall.

Our initial concern was that no world leaders would come, but the opposite was beautifully true. First Sir Richard Branson came, then Ban Ki-moon, then the heads of Gucci, Skype and Wikipedia. Soon it was kings and queens, billionaires and, over the last few years, thousands more. In fact, over the last dozen years, more than 200,000 people, from kids to world leaders, have gone through these programmes, all over the globe.



Container loading at Crossroads, donated goods are packed up in large shipments every week and sent off to over 90 countries, most recently to Cameroon, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia

We soon met a new challenge, though. Globally, resources were available, and globally those same items were needed, but the two parties couldn't always find each other. We looked for an online platform that could link these two parties together, but to no avail, so we turned to the biggest group we could think of - the United Nations. Our rationale was simple: If anyone should know of such a global platform, the UN should. The reality we learned was that no such global platform existed, but one was needed, and Crossroads was asked by many to build it. Wonderfully, at just this time, volunteers came alongside us

engagement platform.

It was at this point, though, that something most unexpected began.

This organisation, which we'd never intended to start, suddenly turned 10 years old, and we wanted to use the moment to show the world the heart behind why we serve. Instead of doing a conventional fund-raising dinner, though, we invited CEOs out to our site, and stripped them of their possessions: their watches, their wallets, their laptops, their phones. We gave them hammers, nails and rubbish, and for 24-hours, let them build and live



António Guterres (in blue sweatshirt), 9th Secretary-General of the United Nations participating in Crossroads' Refugee Run simulation

The most extraordinary thing, though, is watching what happens after they participate: We have seen companies begin new work to assist refugees, or develop plans to help half a million small-farm holders, Syrian kids are now back in schools, people have changed their jobs to serve, and many, many lives have been lifted out of poverty. And what has spurred all this? Hearts, catalysed by compassion, have moved beyond the lie of feeling “too small”, to the truth of knowing that their lives are needed, and can make a difference!

The above story is encouraging, but it is only one. Other stories could be told of the origins of Mother Teresa's work with the poor, or Florence Nightingale's role in establishing nursing, or the Red Cross founder's revolutionary work

of caring impartially for all in need. Each one of those stories may look different but, at their core, there is a common theme: At some point, in each instance, the needs around those individuals grew so great, that they could no longer stand by while precious lives perished, and so they offered, wholeheartedly, what was in their hands – their skills, their talents, their time, their resources – in the service of needs far greater than they could ever meet. And the result of those seemingly small efforts?

The world changed.

I don't know who is reading this. I don't know what needs stir you, what opportunities are around you, and what talents sit within the gift of life you've been given... but the

world needs you. Do not worry, at least initially, about bold or grand objectives, but rather, bravely, quietly, draw near to the poor, the displaced, the needy. Listen to their hearts' cries, until your own heart begins to break. Then, as you look at your own hands, you will hear the truth that says, “Yes, yes you can. You can help. You can make a difference.” The only question that remains is “Will you?”

To find out more about the work Crossroads Foundation do, including the Refugee Run simulation the author described, visit:

<https://www.crossroads.org.hk/>

Watch David's Ted Talk here:

<https://youtu.be/4gAP3z4g57w>



David Begbie, Director at Crossroads, hosting a simulation to students from Hong Kong

David James Begbie

David Begbie is Director of the Crossroads Global Village and a senior spokesman for the humanitarian aid and development organisation, headquartered in Hong Kong.

Over the past 20 years, David has spoken widely about the work of this organisation, representing them for the press, education institutions, business corporation, consular and United Nations events. He is also the director of Crossroads' experiential programs which have seen over 200,000 participants engage in simulations, including attendees at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. His role includes strategic leadership in the development of a new initiative, an experiential Global Village Showcasing global needs and solutions.

David holds a Bachelor of Arts in East Asian Studies and a Master of Arts in NGO leadership.

He grew up in Asia and currently makes his home in Hong Kong with his wife, two sons and a very friendly dog.



Note from Editor in Chief:

I first met Mr. Begbie (we call him "DJ") when I attended the refugee simulation he hosted at Crossroads. Experiencing the life of someone stripped of freedom, security and dignity for just under an hour, was not nearly long enough. It was not enough to understand the full spectrum of their hardship, yet it was enough to spark a flame within that lit up the ignorance I once harbored for problems in our world. Ignorance is not a fault, but inaction is.

What I remember most about DJ is his hug. He gives massive bear hugs. You're wrapped so tight against him that you can feel his heartbeat through his chest. His hugs are also about a whole 20 seconds longer than the average embrace; just long enough for you to feel connected with another human being, through compassion, warmth, and..what I like to think of as a shared sense of faith in humanity. In human kindness.

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All products at Crossroads Marketplace are purchased on fair trade principles which prioritize groups that empower women through vocational opportunities and training. Producers set their own price for handicrafts based on the cost of production and the margins required for a decent income. Products are made by artisans from across the world, including Hong Kong.

Choose from handicrafts made from banana fibre by Congolese Refugees in Rwanda to knitted stuffed toys from Zimbabwe to silk business card holders and bullet shell keyrings made in Cambodia to felt wood hair accessories from Mongolia and handmade aloe vera soap from Ecuador - and much more!

VISIT: [HTTPS://WWW.GLOBALHANDICRAFTS.ORG/](https://www.globalhandicrafts.org/)

By shopping at Crossroads Marketplace, you give strength and solution to people across the globe as they emerge from hardship and inequality.



FROM EINAR TO LILI

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PART OF LGBT

BY EMILY

Last night I had the most beautiful dream. I dreamed that I was a baby in my mother's arms. And she looked down at me, and she called me Lili.

to become a transgender, which is defined as someone who wishes to undergo physical changes, whether it be appearance only or surgical changes of body parts, to become the opposite gender.

community who hardly know about the T community. I also get asked often how is it that he was married to a woman to then suddenly being interested in men when dressed as a woman - does it mean "love" has

Simple words but actually powerful. This is a quote from the popular movie in 2015 called *The Danish Girl* which is the first movie, arguably, that brought attention to the mainstream public (also known as straight people) about transgenders and stimulated many discussions amongst people both familiar or unfamiliar to this niche of people.

MOVIE INTRODUCTION

In the movie, Einar, being married to his wife Gerda, realized one day when trying on female dress and stockings posing for a portrait, that he is in love with wearing female clothes. The story moved from him acting more like a transvestite, which is typically a male who derives pleasure from wearing women's clothes, to then developing a strong desire

Objectively, such progression in mindset is not impossible but it is not a good portrayal of how all transgenders come to discover about themselves - a seed, unfortunately because of this movie's wide reception, may have been incorrectly planted in the minds of straight folks or even members of LGB

really always been confined to the traditional binary definition of one "man" and one "woman"? However, three basic elements composing the concept of sexual orientation - identity, attraction, expression - exist separately in a neuroanatomical sense, as famously illustrated in the "Gingerbread Person".

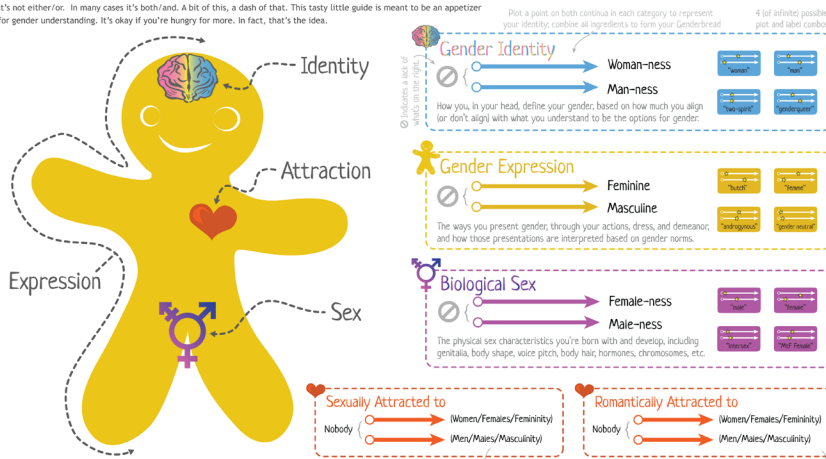


Movie poster of *The Danish Girl*

The Genderbread Person v3.3

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don't. Like Inception. Gender isn't binary. It's not either/or. In many cases it's both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be an appetizer for gender understanding. It's okay if you're hungry for more. In fact, that's the idea.

by its pronounced **METROsexual** com



The Genderbread Person shows that human sexuality has many separate dimensions and are on a continuum

surgery” in recent years. Behavior or gender expression, on the other hand, also exists on a different continuum, and does not necessarily correspond traditionally to sexual orientation or gender identity. For example, a girl you see walking on the street wears a tie and dress pants may just like to dress androgynously and is not necessarily bisexual or lesbian.

LGBT RIGHTS GLOBALLY

Given the abundant scientific evidence out there pointing to a biological basis for homosexuality or transgenderism, we should be convinced it isn't really a “lifestyle” LGBT members choose to live but rather, which gender you are or you love is without choice and comes naturally. However, there are twin studies that would tell a different story - by definition, a pair of twins share 100% of their genes but it has been found that not all pairs of twins share the same sexual orientation, time and again. People including supporters of LGBT community, believe epigenetics (environment's influence on modification of genes) and environment itself may account for such differences. This is clearly an area of interest that begs for more collaborative studies between sociology and science. Whatever the evidence may be, I think most would agree is there should be fair treatment towards the LGBT community. Unfortunately, cultural norms and tradition can't

THE NEUROBIOLOGY BEHIND

A hypothalamic region, a brain part responsible for reproductive behavior and sexual response, called INAH3 dictates one's attraction. Dr. LeVay at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in San Diego found that this region is double as large for heterosexual males compared to gay male whose sizes are comparable to straight females. Another area, which appears to dictate gender identity, called the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis (BSTc) is also located in hypothalamus and is essential for masculine sexual behavior is twice as big in men as compared to women. But Male-to-Female (MtF)-transgenders have a female-sized BSTc, all preceding hormonal therapy and were not influenced by sex hormones, as found in a Nature study by Dr. Zhou. So a trans person may be born as a male yet identify as a female. The extent of these results are just scratching

the surface of studies on the biology of homosexuality. The neural wiring and complexity involved tells us that a person born with male genitalia can identify mentally as a female and yet be a lesbian (attracted to a female after being transgendered into a female) or even a bisexual. It therefore appears that Lili, in the movie, can be attracted to both genders despite a strong desire to be female. You probably realize by now terminology is an intricately important concept in the LGBT community. It is funny to read applications or forms everywhere to have mixed up “gender” and “sex”. Sex should only be used to describe someone by what biological part they possess whereas gender refers to a deeper layer which is the mental identity. This is why “sexual reassignment surgery” (surgical procedure to transform one from one gender to another) has recently become “gender confirmation

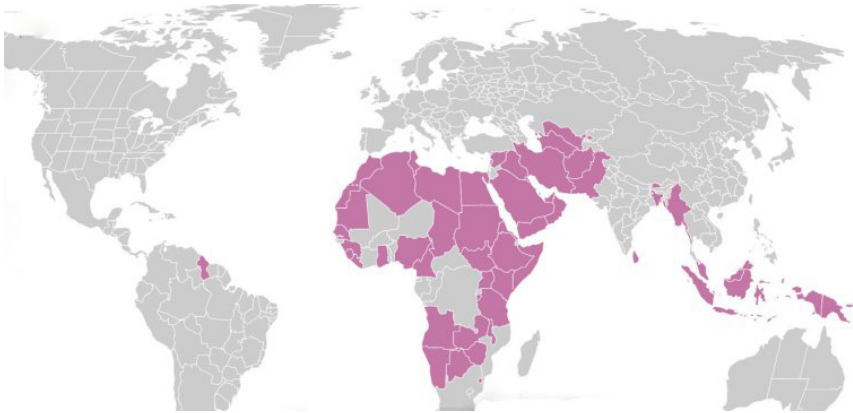
THE NEURAL WIRING AND COMPLEXITY INVOLVED TELLS US THAT A PERSON BORN WITH MALE GENITALIA CAN IDENTIFY MENTALLY AS A FEMALE AND YET BE A LESBIAN (ATTRACTED TO A FEMALE AFTER BEING TRANSGENDERED INTO A FEMALE) OR EVEN A BISEXUAL

coexist with anti-discrimination in many countries, even nowadays. Homosexuals and transgender individuals caught engaging in intimate behavior or intercourse are still punishable by jail in 73 countries to date, ranging from Malaysia to Pakistan to Mozambique.

individuals to live freely and openly in the workplace, while a few Asia-Pacific countries including Taiwan have put in place anti-discrimination laws. This means biased employers have the right to refuse to hire or to fire someone just because of their sexual orientation. In just June 2018,

Local secondary schools in Hong Kong also bar students from forming rainbow or gay alliance sort of student organization due to their school's religious affiliation

HOMOSEXUALS
AND TRANSGENDER
INDIVIDUALS
CAUGHT ENGAGING
IN INTIMATE
BEHAVIOR OR
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DATE



Map of the 73 countries with laws against sexual relations between people of the same sex

Now this does not even mean homosexual marriage is legal in all other countries, but at least hosting a gay pride parade or a passionate kiss on the street won't put you behind bars in all. On this note, kudos to India's Supreme Court for unanimously appealing the ban against homosexuality, truly providing much relief and courage to LGBT community and straight allies (supporters of the community) all around the world.

LGBT RIGHTS LOCALLY

We don't even have to look as far as out as Malaysia (which is predominantly Islamic by culture and this partially explains its conservative view on homosexuality), just take a look at our home, Hong Kong. It has a dearth of statistics and research on prevalence, legal practices, experiences of LGBT individuals. More importantly, there are no laws in place that would even guarantee the rights of freedom for LGBT



People marching at Pride Parade in India, taken by SCMP

the Hong Kong Court of Appeal had ruled against Mr Angus Leung who was a gay civil servant married to his husband abroad asking to grant them spousal benefits and allow joint tax filing. The court reasoned in their judgments using words such as "history" and "tradition" that societal views override the official recognition of this marriage, not to mention gay marriage or its alternative versions - domestic partnership or civil partnership are not written into Hong Kong's law.

with Christianity or Catholicism. It is no wonder that individuals in the LGBT community, in the face of societal pressure and with minimal sense of belonging would historically experience higher rates of depression, anxiety and suicide rates than their straight counterparts, across all age range. A study in the September 2018 issue of *Pediatrics* journal found that nearly 14% of teens who participated in a survey reported trying to kill themselves, with transgender teens reporting

the highest rates of suicide attempts, especially transgender male teens (born female but desire to be male), based on United States figures. However, no such figures have yet been researched or published for Hong Kong, calling for an urgent need in this area to understand this population more.

PERSONAL MUSING

Just like in the movie, the real Lili from the 1930s did die from heart complications after her reassignment surgery, but apparently she had also set a date to kill herself after two decades of believing she was a woman trapped in a man's body and many doctors and psychologists had labeled her as schizophrenic in order to explain her "malady." At the end of all this, I hope no one believes that it is ever simply a lifestyle or choice that anyone chooses to be L, B, G, or T - with this comes the responsibility to come out as well as shame and self-struggle to face this heteronormative and homo- or trans-phobic society - without harming others,



Scene from *The Danish Girl*

BIASED EMPLOYERS
HAVE THE RIGHT TO
REFUSE TO HIRE OR
TO FIRE SOMEONE
JUST BECAUSE OF
THEIR SEXUAL
ORIENTATION



every person deserves to be treated with basic human rights and respect without fear of being judged or attacked because of others' religious beliefs or intolerance.

With her loving ex-wife Gerda by her side, Lili mustered the remaining physical strength in her after the surgery and in her breath, smilingly said,

How have I ever deserved such love?

There's nothing to be afraid of anymore.

Last night

I had the most beautiful dream.

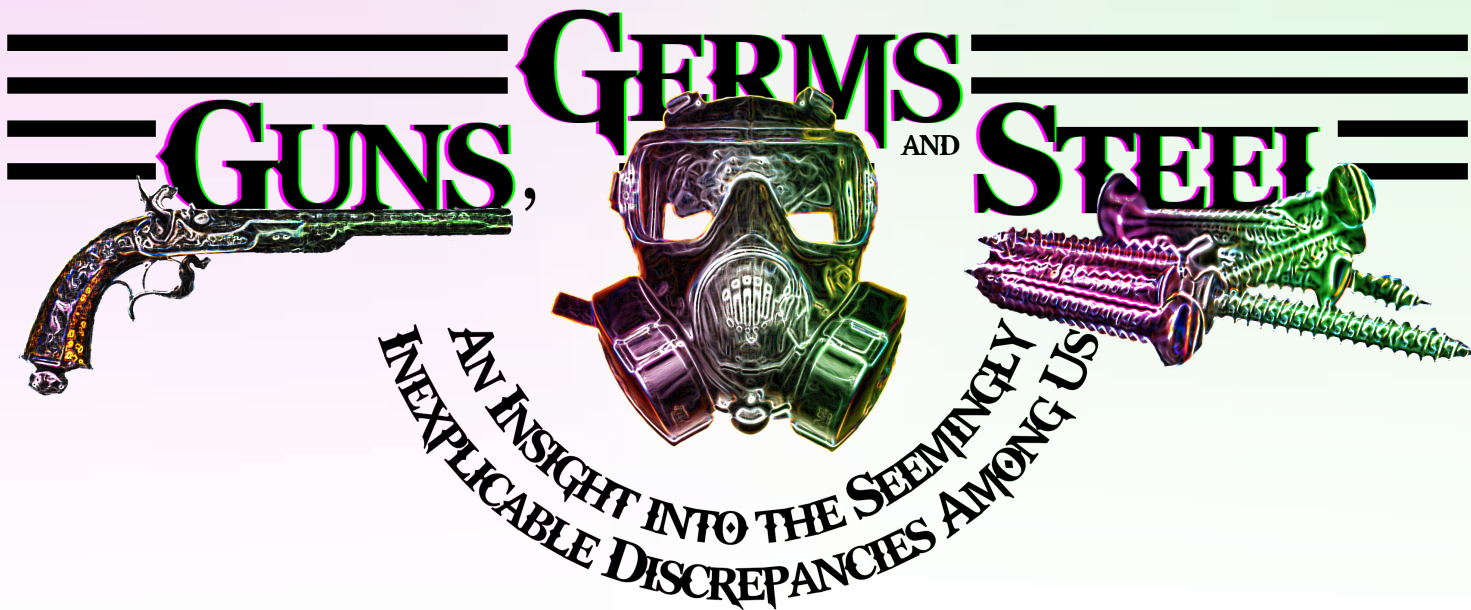
I dreamed that I was a baby in my mother's arms.

And she looked down at me, and she called me Lili.

SPECIAL NOTE

If anyone in the LGBT community needs immediate help or someone to talk to, please consider reaching out for help. There are organizations out there who can help:

- **Rainbow of Hong Kong**
 - Enquiry: 2769 1069
 - Emergency Hotline: 8108 1069, 6144 4454, 9791 4641
- **Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC)**
 - Enquiry: 2511 8211
- **Suicide Prevention Services**
 - (24 hours) Enquiry: 2382 0000
 - "Youth link" hotline: 2382 0777
- **Transgender Resource Center**
 - Counseling: 8203 2100
- **CUHK Prince of Wales Hospital Gender Clinic**
 - Call Prince of Wales for enquiry (need referral): 3505 3555



BY BERNARD

"I am a German when we win, but I am an immigrant when we lose" - Mesut Özil

"We were the world champion four years ago! How come we are eliminated at such an early stage in the competition?" Amidst a mixture of extreme confusion and disappointment after the humiliating 2 to 0 defeat to South Korea in the FIFA World Cup in Russia this summer, people from all over Germany were thrown into a state of shock and disbelief. They debated frantically about what kind of improvements were required to restore the glory four years ago as the championship holder.

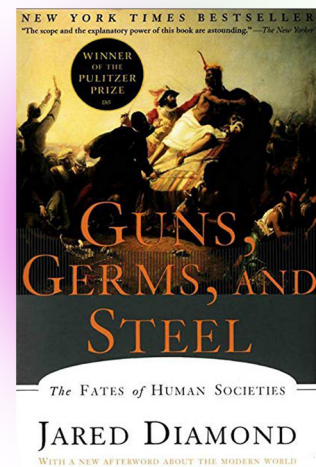
At this very tumultuous moment, however, the issue of racism also received much media coverage throughout Germany, as a football star of Turkish descent, Mesut Özil, decided to withdraw from the German national team believing that he had been disrespected on racial grounds. On his Twitter, he expressed that "I am a German when we win, but I am an immigrant when

we lose". As Özil put it, "They had never accepted me as a true German" and he accused some German fans of insulting him by bursting out "Özil F*** you Turkish pig! Piss off and go back to your home!" after the World Cup.

Even though Özil's accusation was not without its own controversy and I cannot give a very definitive answer as to whether he is to blame or not, this very revival of the racial debate once again prompted me to contemplate on the topic of racism in Europe. Anywhere from Spanish Inquisition, the Dreyfus Affair to Nazi Germany, the element of race has long been embedded deeply in European society and has never really vanished. As more and more immigrants from other cultures have entered this socially constructed realm of "Europe", namely, the more technologically and culturally advanced entity without having a clear definition (e.g. Do you count Melilla and Ceuta as part of Europe?), more and more uphill challenges are yet to come.

I wanted to delve more deeply into the past of Europe and embark on an intellectual journey to understand the origin of "Eurocentrism"; that is, the belief that Europe is far more advanced than any other place in this world in terms of education, economics and scientific development.

One day as I aimlessly sauntered through a bookstore in Berlin, a book titled *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* came into my view.



Cover of *Guns, Germs and Steel* by Jared Diamond (Copyright under W.W.Norton - fair dealing in Hong Kong)

As I read the preface of the book it immediately captured my attention: what on earth do guns, germs and steel have something to do with each other? Much to my surprise, this book is not one talking about the chemical reaction between them; instead, the preface was so gripping that I felt as if the author, Jared Diamond had stood in front of me and provided insightful explanations as to how Guns, Germs and Steel, the three deceptively unimportant materials brought about the discrepancies among different civilizations.



Picture showing Mesut Özil
(credits to Ronald Macdonald CC BY 2.0)

Entering the Book - The Yali Question

From the very beginning of this book, Diamond mentions how Yali, a young charismatic politician and one of his closest confidants in Papua New Guinea, inspired him to write this book discussing the notable differences among distinct cultures. In fact, it was not until not very long ago when the Papua New Guinean society drastically transformed from one with mere stone age technologies to one with “modern” political institutions and technologies. Being a witty person with an insatiable desire for knowledge who had never been out of Papua New Guinea, Yali

asked Diamond curiously, “Why is it that the Westerners were able to produce ‘cargo’ (e.g. “modern” products like automobiles and television) themselves and spread them to the world, while we, having the same level of intelligence as *Homo Sapiens*, could not achieve this remarkable feat? Are there any possible explanations to this strange phenomenon?”

This “Yali Question” had ever since become the main motivating factor for Diamond to write this book: “Why did history unfold so differently for different continents? Why is it that, for instance, King Charles I of Spain was able to invade the Inca Empire instead of the other way around? What caused the technological differences then?”. As a researcher who spent most of his time working in the forest in Papua New Guinea, he observed that people in Papua New Guinea are not in any case more stupid than Europeans; sometimes they are even more brilliant and creative, as he found through his day-to-day interaction with the local people. The obsolete belief as acclaimed by explorers and eugenicists in Europe for centuries that Europeans are intrinsically superior to other peoples does not make any sense to him. The seemingly inexplicable result of Europeans successfully conquering other islands from other civilizations may come from an ultimate cause that has not yet been elucidated by the academia and the public alike in the time being. According to Diamond, it is far more important to find out the ultimate cause of the differences among different cultures instead of fixating on the success or the failure of a civilization to the proximate cause, e.g. attributing The Age of Discovery to the Introduction of Compass, which is much more unpredictable and contains much more unreliable variations within.

To answer this difficult ‘Yali Question’, Diamond spent another twenty five years researching, putting forward new hypotheses that stretch people’s imagination, and combining biological, linguistic as well as ethnological pieces of possible supporting evidence together. Diamond ended up writing a comprehensive book covering anywhere from food production to how allocation of natural resources affects the development of a society from the perspective of certain countries.

Why did history unfold so differently for different continents? Why is it that, for instance, King Charles I of Spain was able to invade the Inca Empire instead of the other way around? What caused the technological differences then?

Domestication

What is domestication in its essence? Diamond goes to great lengths into discussing what kinds of effects domestication will bring about to the benefit of the advancement of a civilization.

According to Diamond, there are many leading causes that serve to explain why people in Eurasia

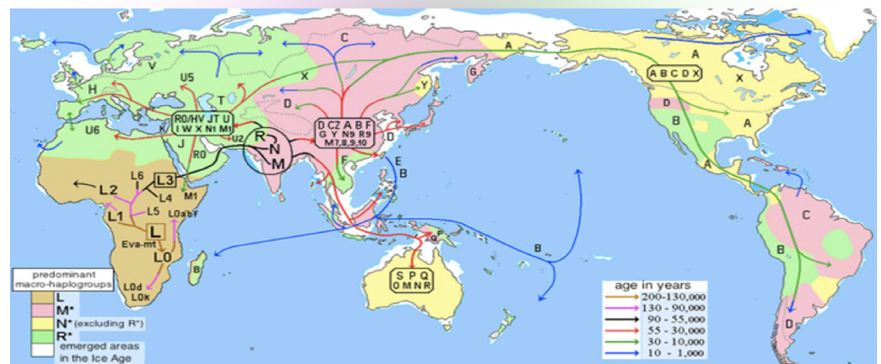
had more domesticated animals and plants at their disposal. The first reason, as Diamond suggests, is due to the fact that Eurasia contains much more land mass and thus a more diversified ecosystem, which contains anything from desert, plains, plateaus, to glaciers; Eurasia has more to offer and as a result creates a lot of distinct creatures that have a higher potential and room for domestication. The successful domestication of these animals equipped most civilizations in Eurasia with highly productive agriculture and the ability to annihilate other cultures outside of Eurasia that do not follow the same practices when they came into contact with each other.

It is also worth mentioning that the history of human migration provides an interesting viewpoint into the effectiveness of domestication. From genetic evidence, we know that *Homo Sapiens*, the ancestors of all modern humans, followed a migration pattern from Africa all the way to other continents, with the Americas being one of the latest to have their trace. Diamond suggests that as the humans migrated, their hunting skills also improved gradually as time went by. This is the primary reason why most of the species of animals hunted in Eurasia still remain thriving as the animals in Eurasia have much more time to adapt while a lot of animals suitable for domestication in the Americas are instantly exterminated.

Last but not least, Diamond mentions a concept called “The Anna Karenina Principle”. Leo Tolstoy’s book *Anna Karenina* begins with the following sentence: “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way”. If we apply this sentence to the situation of domestication, it suggests that when a certain kind of animal has not been

domesticated, there must be an underlying reason behind it. For instance, elephants requires too long a cycle for a generation (elephants you see in Hannibal movies are tamed but not domesticated) while bears’ meat is superb and nutritious but they are highly aggressive when coming of age.

All in all, these supposed reasons can explain why of all the fourteen large animals domesticated on the globe, only llamas are located in the Americas. Also, with the humans’ later arrival time in the Americas, the crops that are local to the Americas mostly went through shorter time of domestication, which indicate people in the Americas suffer from longer birth spacing and have a smaller population density and less of a governmental structure as a result.



Americans and other non-European peoples were killed by Eurasian germs than by Eurasian guns and steel weapons.” In Eurasia, more frequent contacts with other civilizations induced a higher resistance of the Eurasians to invading pathogens. Native people were not decimated because of the wrath from God, but simply out of a lack of exposure to the outside world.

What About the Differences Within Eurasia?

In this book, Diamond also makes some observations about differences of scientific development between the western and eastern part of Eurasia. Here we use Europe and China as the tokens for the West and the East respectively.

While generally speaking, China is far more connected to other places, this geographic trait is not without its own demerit. As Diamond remarks, this very trait of China makes the progress of innovation very dependent on the leader's decision as the country; once a despot is at the helm, then the entire China would be set in a backward motion. Contrary to the politically unified China, Europe is politically

more disintegrated given its more indented coastlines with peninsulas and islands. Before Columbus found sponsorship from Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain, four other queens or kings had rejected him, not willing to undertake too much risk for going to the west. Therefore, regions with a moderate connectedness without being too highly or lowly connected to the neighboring ones are the most optimal, as Diamond mentions.

My Afterthoughts

After finishing reading this book, I would say that even though I do not fully agree with some of the reasons he mentions as to why some cultures have the capability to overpower other ones, it is one that is extremely thought-provoking and provides me with some angles that I previously have never thought of. This very thought process has helped me formulate my own answer to certain questions that I have always been asking myself.

In my opinion, there are no intrinsic superiority or inferiority among people with different cultures, religions as well as ethnicities around the world. When given the same opportunities and resources, different people will be able to achieve the same result. This book shows me a great example of how easily people will stumble into the trap by making naive assumptions and asserting judgement against others. For example, there is an acquaintance of mine who once mentioned to me about the reason why black people in Los Angeles deserve to be discriminated against. He explained that black people are much more likely to commit crimes than any other ethnicities, to which I replied that it is really dangerous to jump to hasty conclusions without

considering what the chain of causations leading to this higher rate of crime is. Is it because of inequality that causes the lack of education among black people? Are they able to get access to the medical resources needed? Are we, inadvertently, breeding more hostility by categorizing people into different labels?



A poster showing “Maria without Sharia” in Germany (credits to Alamy images)

Also, in a society where there is an economical structure inequality, those with lower socioeconomic status tend to feel relative deprivation and harbour resentment against the immigrants because they believe that it is the immigrants who rob their jobs (when in fact, it often does not). This partly explains why during the 1930s, even though the Jews only accounted for less than one percent of the population in the Nazi Germany, they were made as convenient scapegoats in bolstering Hitler's own popularity facing German economical difficulties.

The two examples mentioned above demonstrate how devastating and contagious inequality would be when handled poorly. It is like a snowball that rolls down the hill, and as it gathers more inequality on its way, there will definitely be an avalanche like the one we experienced in World War Two.

This book shows me a great example of how easily people will stumble into the trap by making naive assumptions and asserting judgement

Last but not least, Dr. Sivin's (See UGFN Box at end of article) discussion related to "Scientific Revolution" also reflects some of the problems where an "European ideal" may be self-hampering and sometimes impose unreasonable expectations on those making an effort to enter the "sanctuary" of Europe. Should, for example, Muslim women in France be banned from wearing burqas following the "European ideal" of secularism? Are we fettered by the very criteria and values that we regard as liberating? These are very important questions that are far from simple, for us to explore in this humanist 21st century: what kind of values should we humans hold when most of the things in our world are automated?

Here I stand in front of the Bebelplatz, where the Nazi book burnings took place in 1933, and wear a wistful smile as I look into the distance; I firmly believe that racial hatred will be something of the past.

Further Readings:

- Özil, Mesut. "The past couple of weeks have given me time to reflect, and time to think over the events of the last few months. Consequently, I want to share my thoughts and feelings about what has happened." Twitter. July 22, 2018. <https://twitter.com/MesutOzil1088/status/1020984884431638528>
- Sivin, Nathan. "Why the Scientific Revolution Did Not Take Place in China - or Did It?" *The Environmentalist* 5, no. 1 (1985): 39-50. doi:10.1007/bf02239866.

UGFN Box: Nathan Sivin's *Why the Scientific Revolution did not take place in China - or did it?*

In his book, Dr. Nathan Sivin discusses the question of "Why didn't Scientific Revolution take place in China." Even though his topic may not be exactly be the same as Diamond's, I believe that there are some similarities and analogies that these two topics share.

In his text, Dr. Sivin describes how a lot of scholars deem that everything "non-European" in the oriental societies to be detrimental to the development of "modern science" and that oriental societies do not contain the same elements necessary for the "Scientific Revolution" to take place. The evaluations of the "Scientific Revolution" of some scholars, according to Dr. Sivin, are biased as they depend too heavily on the European traditions.



Bebelplatz in Berlin, across Humboldt University of Berlin (image by A. Savin, Copyleft)

Are we fettered by the very criteria and values that we regard as liberating?

Ten days with *Fuerdai* and what I have come to realise

Rich Chinese Millennials
Navigating Through the Dark Abyss of
Loneliness and Comparison

By Lok Ping

Disclaimer: the views expressed here are not reflective of anyone other than me—whose judgments are always subject to change and revision in the wake of constant bombardment of thoughts and constructive criticism. Solely for team Potter, Weasley or Granger. Do not read if you are from the Malfoy family.



Movie Harry Potter (Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy)

The world is full of wonder in many senses. As a lifelong Harry Potter fan I have long been accustomed to believing truth will prevail in the fullness of time with the collaboration of people with merits, beliefs, and trust, even with no money nor any family background. However, I was struck lately with a mind-blowing experience having spent days with a group of snobbish pure bloods. I never thought my life would take me to that very instant I was living in.

“I Am Someone’s Son”



Movie The Wolf of Wall Street (Leonardo DiCaprio as Jordan Belfort)

A while ago I returned from a ten-day long trip from Beijing for a program I had applied, which described itself as one that brings together talented youths from across the strait, Hong Kong, Macau, and overseas Chinese communities for an intensive training on Chinese foreign affairs to better prepare this group of young talents to do business along the Belt and Road. There, 40 of us, mostly aged under 40, attended six hours of class every day. That also means that we had to find our ways to make friends or to participate “meaningfully” in the course such that we left no regrets behind—well, regrets differ from one to another. I was clear what my aims were—learning about the Chinese angles of foreign affairs. In the meantime, I was expecting friends and nice food to be positive externalities of the program (quite utilitarian I know).

It turns out that I was not the only utilitarian person there. As a

matter of fact, I was almost the most idealistic person there. Other than me, the participants were all from very wealthy backgrounds and went there just to make friends (with benefits) and get investments. The first questions they asked were: “Who is your dad? What do you do?” After a series of interrogation, they determined your “value”, which corresponds to the attention you get from them throughout the course.

Let me recount some examples for you to get a better idea of how these people behaved. They asked about each other’s families, not about that person, but his family; they talked about how many horses their families owned, and put everyone into horse classes and would even say it out (one guy literally said “I am a first-class horse, and you are second-class...”); they skipped classes, or came to class late with a hangover, saying they had “important” things to do during the night. They competed to pay the bill

while bragging and parading their “generosity” to their peers. They went the extra mile to impress girls with cakes and flowers while lying about who paid for the cakes. They boasted about their companies, like how many billions they made in the first quarter, but when other people asked them for their company profiles for potential investment purposes, they said “sorry man I just sold my company a month ago”; they openly talked about the number of girls they had sex with, with one guy even saying that he had once had a girlfriend from the British Royal family, just so that this girl could protect him (I honestly can’t figure out why a grown-up man like him would need any protection. I don’t know what protection he was referring to. I didn’t want to know). They did not care about their attendance and neither did the organiser. Networking seemed to be the key goal of everyone.



China's richest 2130 people have as much money as the world's fifth-largest economy.

Credits to (AFP/Getty Images)

These people competed to outshine one another. They are all ultra-rich second-generation kids from China, or what we call, in Chinese, *Fuerdai*. They don't want to be known for themselves. They feel good being defined as someone's son. I do not want to generalise, but at least most people I met there were like that.

The Phenomenon of Fuerdai

Fuerdai (富二代) refers to the second generation of the country's wealthy class, who made their fortune in the wake of the market liberalisation in post-reform China in 1978. They may be children of the nouveau riche ("tuhao" 土豪), but may also be blue blood whose families have been wealthy aristocrats for generations. These people may already be in their 30s or 40s but still behave like kids. Ostentatiously flaunting their wealth from time to time, *fuerdai* are often pictured in the media as being spendthrifts shopping for Ferrari, Porsche and Birkin bags. They went to Ivy League universities, speak native English, and have the perfect CVs. While a handful of them pursue their dreams, many follow the traditional obstacle-free

path and went into their family businesses.

For many, *fuerdai* is a notorious label to wear publicly because it dismisses their talents and own ideas. But some other people just couldn't care less about being identified as *fuerdai*; rather, they feel proud to be part of the second-generation group (which they call 2-G Group) since they no longer need to explain to every single person they meet how rich they are—being part of 2-G, similar to owning a horse, is already an indication of wealth in itself.

Fuerdai symbolise China's Great Gatsby era and its mad dash for economic growth following stagnation brought by the Cultural Revolution. But as I believe many would agree, money is no guarantee for any particular merit or competence. Instead, the rise of *fuerdai* brings about and is itself a manifestation of social and moral problems associated with modern Chinese society. The root cause of these problems is income inequality.

Economic growth alone does not provide a full picture of a country's development. Income inequality in China is caused by many

factors—historical, social and political. Historically, after year 1978, some families took off and climbed the social ladder because they had the idea, resources, and luck. There is no problem with it at all. However, the policies that the government introduced then were technically encouraging an unequal distribution of resources, which have made these families become richer and richer while the rest become poorer and poorer. Deng Xiaoping's dicta of "let some people get rich first" and prioritisation to develop the East, on the one hand, have both been proven successful as reflected by China's excellent economic performance following its Opening-Up, but on the other hand, have made fatal mistakes in terms of increasing overall inequality, rural-urban inequality, and inland-coastal inequality. A research looking into economic situation of eight provinces in China has shown that between 1989 and 2004, income in coastal provinces has tripled whilst that of the inland has only doubled. Socially, China's Hukou system (户口) which originally intended to regulate population distribution has institutionalised inequality and consolidated PRC administrative control over the population. It has contributed to limited rural-urban migration and aggravated inland-coastal inequality. Politically, widespread corruption after 1978 has led to public outrage and consequently resulted in the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. The military crackdown not only put off the little spark for democratisation of China, but also amplified the magnitude of corruption in China for decades, tremendously increasing inequality by affecting income and welfare distribution. Increased inequality in turn promotes corruption between political elites and poorer people who have no choice but to bribe the officials.

From Heaven to Earth

On my way back to Hong Kong, I could not help thinking about what I had seen the past two weeks. Did I enjoy a bit of the programme? No. Did I make any friends at all? Yes. The girl I mentioned whose dad is a Chinese politician and I became good friends, partly because we shared a room, and more importantly because we both understand showing off is a sign of insecurity and underachievement.

The emergence of these notoriously rich is obviously not a local issue. Rather, it happens almost everywhere in the developed world. It should deserve more attention in contexts outside of China. For example, in South Korea, heirs and heiresses of *chaebols* (family-owned business conglomerates) are treated like princes and princesses, while normal South Korean people worked like dogs. Relative poverty needs to be addressed to mitigate the hard feeling poor people have as they see and interact with the rich. I believe, with humbleness, *Fuerdai* might escape the curse going from clogs to clogs in three generations; with arrogance and ignorance, they will only fall from heaven to earth and end up in misery.

坚持党的基本路线一百年不动摇



Image showing the rapid development of Shenzhen following the Reform and Opening Up (credits to CPC website)

With all contexts determining the nature of China's economic development—abrupt and uneven—certain groups of people with vested interest in the growth of the economy had benefited from leadership transitions and social transformations. They became rich and had the resources to invest, start business, or cooperate with state enterprises, who, after their passings, left their children and grandchildren money, and on top of that, network. That is how *Fuerdai* were born.

“I Can Do More Than Just Inherit Money”

Spending some days with *Fuerdai* has made me rethink everything I thought I knew about life. Can we really eliminate inequality? Is it precisely inequality that makes some groups better off so they strive hard to maintain that gap? How do the children view their parents' money?

While the *Fuerdai* I met in this trip has dragged me to the dark side of money, I also have friends who are rich but still humble and grateful

for everything they have. One girl from Hong Kong I met, whose dad is a high-ranking politician in China, said to me she deeply felt her inadequacy and always wanted to do better. She does not live with her family and makes money from working in the entertainment industry. She knows how to use the money to invest in herself. Although from time to time she still needs financial support from her parents, she knows life is not just about enjoyment and spending money. Although she has yet gained financial independence from her parents, she has shown me she can do more than inherit money.



The background of the page is a reproduction of Sandro Botticelli's painting 'The Birth of Venus'. It depicts the goddess Venus emerging from a seashell, with her long, flowing red hair and pale skin. To her right, a figure, likely Zephyrus, is shown in profile, blowing a breeze towards her. He wears a red and white robe with a floral pattern. The scene is set on a rocky shore with a blue sea and a pale sky. A small pink rose is visible on the left side of the painting.

Love, Toil, and Tears

Ancient Wisdom for the Modern-Day Student

By Serena

"The whole Renaissance attitude of creating sculptures that emulated those from antiquity...surely, they surpassed the Ancient Greeks in their feat?"

Sitting in my history professor's office, with an image of Michelangelo's *David* propped up on the desk between us, I posed the question above, with self-assured certainty. After all, when you look at something as supremely divine as this:



David

there is no ounce of doubt in my mind that little else produced by mankind can hail as rival - before or after.

That's when my professor pulled up this image on his computer screen:



Laocoön and His Sons. Depicting a Trojan priest and his sons engulfed by venomous serpents sent by the god Poseidon

I felt my breath catch.

I leaned in to examine the image. My eyes drawn to the straining biceps forming the contours of his arms, to the rippling muscles splaying out across his chest, and the tender folds of skin below his navel, through to the rivulets of veins running along his inner thigh, framing the knobs of his kneecap...down to the angular knuckles of his toes...and back up at the anguished faces that convey such intense restraint and resolve. My eyes then followed the entwining curve of the serpent, its unrelenting death grip enhancing every flesh, muscle and bone. And it's as if I was transported *into* the computer screen and melded with the

sculpture...I felt a sense of entanglement and suffocation overcome me, I felt my own muscles tense and flex,

then a momentary relief as I drew breath and gathered strength, before being consumed all over again by an overwhelming sense of defeat and defiance all at once.

"This dates from classical antiquity. Maybe around 50 B.C.", came my professor's voice, snapping me back to the present. "So...*did* the Renaissance artists surpass the Greeks? I wouldn't be so quick to say that."



That was a profound moment in my life. It made me realize how ignorant modernity can be, in all the abundance and arrogance of our advancements, it is easy to sometimes

dismiss the achievements and skills of our ancestors. Witnessing a piece of work like *Laocoön and His Sons*, and coming to terms with the fact that those who lived more than two thousand years before us had such superior knowledge in anatomy, such impeccable ability to work a chisel, and such refined skills in depicting human emotion...I felt infinitely humbled.

As I got home, I found myself thumbing through the bookshelf until I found my copy of Plato's *Symposium*, and promptly committed myself to rereading the entire text with renewed interest and zeal.

In the *Symposium*, a group of Greek aristocratic elites gather at a drinking party in praise of Eros, the Greek god of love and desire. I believe the ideas discussed in the *Symposium* are adaptable and enduring enough that they should continue to guide our values despite the two thousand plus years that have elapsed since its conception. Therefore, this is an essay that endeavors to explore four themes in this classical text: loneliness, self-improvement, compassion and humility, by reflecting on their contemporary relevance.



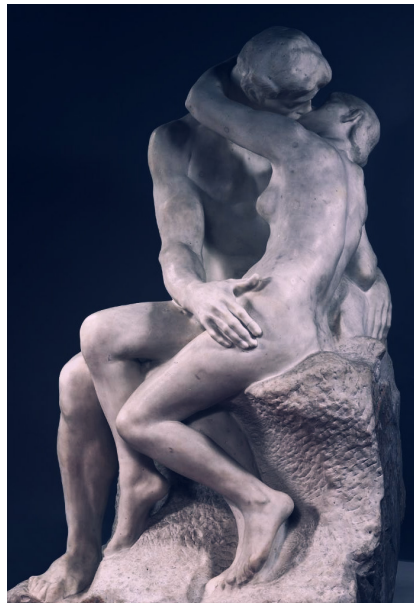
Making Sense of Loneliness

"After being split in half, they threw their arms around one another in close embrace, desiring to be reunited...So it is that ever since that far-off time, love of one person for another has been inborn in human beings, and its role is to restore us to our ancient state by trying to make unity out of duality and to heal our human condition."

- Aristophanes

I think the most visual and accessible part of the text is Aristophanes' account as he explains the source of human desire. He describes how all humans were originally creatures with two heads, four arms and four legs. One day, they angered the gods, who split them in half with thunderbolts and ever since we have been on a quest to quite literally - reunite with our other half.

After you get over the somewhat unsettling imagery of this allegory, there is something deeply human about what it conveys. Yes, that wistful sense of longing many of us have felt, perhaps after a long day or on a cold night or during a particularly happy or sad moment when you wish you could have shared it with someone. No words needed, just the feel of their embrace. Like Roudin's lovers:



The Kiss

we are instilled within us a capacity for and to love, so exorbitant in its expression that it is at once passionate yet tender. To Aristophanes, this is not just a physical expression of affection, but reflects a deeper and innate desire to be whole again.

For those who feel a little forlorn for being with, or without a partner,

I think there is something intensely hopeful in the fact that finding love is not just finding someone who compliments or even complements - but *completes* us.

At Your Best

"A lover has a god within him and he is more akin to the divine"

- Phaedrus

We are all familiar with the figure of the mediocre fellow going about his life with semi-demoralized grit, who, at the struck of love becomes invigorated and embarks on a self-transformation that brings out his best attributes. According to Phaedrus, who lived against the backdrop of the Peloponnesian Wars, there is nothing like the incentive of impressing a loved one that fuels one to act with honour, courage and nobility on the battlefield.

Even though we are no longer under siege by the Spartans, the motivation to lift ourselves out of a stagnant existence, to challenge and enhance ourselves in the name of love, is familiar to many: perhaps you've learned a new language that is your love interest's native tongue, improved your culinary skills, your manners, your knowledge in a particular field, or just studied harder.

*Finding love is
not just finding
someone who
compliments or
even complements
- but completes us*

When inspired by love, just like the discus thrower sculpted by the Greeks, we exemplify and aim for excellence.



Discobolus

Although, I would caution against the tendency to be consumed by living to impress or please someone else, and losing yourself in the process; there is nothing divine in mindless servility. Nevertheless, the culmination of these committed acts of self-enhancement is the wondrous ability of love to harness our full potential - the potential to be, as Phaedrus quotes: divine. Isn't that something worth working for.

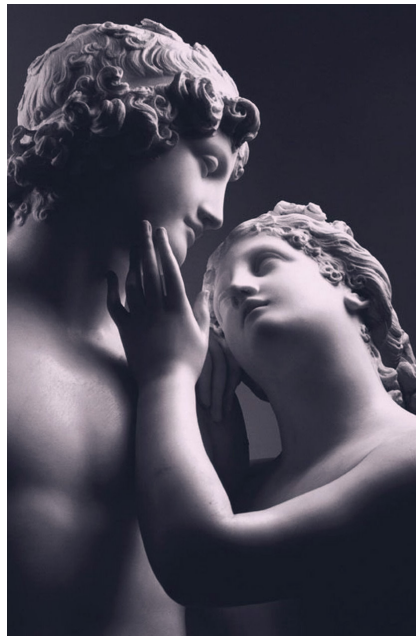
Empathy and Compassion

"A lover is granted complete licence by both gods and men"

- Pausanias

Pausanias' speech was mainly centered on the distinction between

earthly and heavenly love, with respect to the transient and permanent qualities they embody. This is a very Platonic idea that I do not intend to delve into as it is well known. There is however, two brief paragraphs in his speech on a different topic I feel deserve some discussion here. He says: "The strangest thing of all is that when a lover swears an oath and breaks it, he and he alone is forgiven by the gods, for an oath sworn in passion, they say, has no validity". This, I believe, alludes to sentiments almost pertinent to that of Romanticism - the idea that, those in love may be subject to the most outlandish, brazen and indulgent of behaviors; they are victims of their own impulse and emotion. Such was the case when Venus, Goddess of Love, falls in love with the mortal, Adonis:



Venus and Adonis

An unrequited, doomed love affair that has even Venus (arguably one of the haughtier goddesses of her lot) reduced to a pathetic pile, adoring and pleading at her lover's knees. Yet, as Pausanias points out, the gods are inclined to regard such acts of irrationality without scrutiny, without judgement.

In a society where our passions are viewed with scrutiny, and particularly the society we reside in today where social media and news platforms circulate people's stories with ease and efficiency, we cast judgment with as much haste as Zeus wields his thunderbolt...with as much swift as Eros draws his bow. In this age of instant news and messaging, tales of someone else's heartbreak or hardship provide a breeding ground, a springboard, for gossip. Yet, I have faith in our capacity, as humans, for empathy and compassion. It is *not* our place to judge. After all, if the Greek gods (who were notorious for their temper and wrath) could forgive, why couldn't we?

Ignorance and Humility

"But neither do ignorant people pursue wisdom or desire to be wise, for the problem of ignorance is this: that someone who is neither fine and good nor wise is still quite satisfied with himself. No one desires what he does not think he lacks"

- Socrates

All the hype for Socrates' speech in the Symposium is usually centered on Plato's famous Ladder of Love theory, but I want to shed light on another aspect of his speech that I find worth investigating.

Prior to Socrates' speech, all the others have praised Eros with the assumption that he is the embodiment of beauty and perfection. Socrates turned the discussion on its head by deducing that Eros is in fact not beautiful nor wise, but unkempt, barefoot and homeless. Yet, it was precisely this *awareness* of his own lack of wisdom and beauty, that he desires them. In other words, love

is not prideful, love is not ignorant. I find this a beautiful example to the common quote attributed to the great philosopher, namely: "Ignorance is the root of all evil".

The act of love, then, is a testimony to our humility.

Eros, the God of Love, is not defined by what he represents, but what he strives to become. In this way, Socrates strips Eros of the divine status we identify gods with and he is humanized because he lacks in certain qualities. More importantly, he seeks to possess - like many of us in life.

While most portrayals of Eros present him as confident and mischievous, poised to strike with his bow and arrow at unsuspecting victims and then relish in the heartbreak at his devise, I prefer this depiction of him instead where he sleeps like a baby. Almost human, quite vulnerable, defenseless and certainly not "perfect".



Sleeping Eros

This has been a rather comforting revelation for me because it implies that we need to be imperfect, in order to strive for perfection. It is humbling to realize that there is something worthwhile in being inadequate; because it means we have room to improve.

Thus concludes our illuminating journey through *The Symposium*. From Aristophanes we discussed the ancient source for desire, which helps us to validate our loneliness. From Phaedrus we envisioned the all-inspiring capacity of love, which helps us to visualize ourselves at our finest. From Pausanias we examined the devastation of heartbreak, which helps us to vindicate our acts of irrationality. Finally, from Socrates we recognized the core assumption of the act of love, which helps us to venture into this fine domain of human desire with a firm grasp of the virtues it ought to exemplify.

Aside from love, how else do the ancients guide us? As I cast my gaze upon *Laocoön and His Sons* again, two profound thoughts took form in my mind.

First: The Ancient Greeks fashioned their gods in their own image;

they were imperfect, they were flawed. Today, we create god-like images of ourselves; with makeup, with photoshop. Facebook and Instagram have given some people a platform to portray a self-curated version of one's life or an idealized standard for relationships and

love. Like a curse, this culture of image-obsessed social media fanaticism has made them as superficial as the taken-for-the-nth-time selfies they create. They become entwined in their own vanity, tormented by their pride and at the mercy of the superficial standards that they chose to define their worth. Their inner characters begin to resemble the contorted figures of *Laocoön and His Sons*.

Second: The Ancient Greeks lived before the advent of technology, smartphones, and the internet. Since then, the number of hours in a day has stayed constant, yet we have evermore activities to pack into a day. Further, we live in a generation of decadent consumerism. As materialistic distractions continue to mount, we are left with little time at the end of the day for philosophical contemplation. I firmly believe in the inverse relationship between hedonistic materialism and inner solace or moral cultivation. In an age where not just our heads sometimes but even our data is stored in the Cloud, how do we stay grounded? If anything, we have arguably declined as a species in our preference and discipline in investing time on character building, on mind cultivation. Yet, we should. Because these are the moments we reconnect with ourselves and feel that deep rumbling stir within - as I felt when I lay eyes on *Laocoön and His Sons* - that infuses us with clarity and calm.

The Ancient Greeks fashioned their gods in their own image; they were imperfect, they were flawed. Today, we create god-like images of ourselves; with makeup, with photoshop.



UGFH Box: Plato's Symposium

The reasons for this UGFH text deserving so much attention is thoroughly explored throughout the article. In addition, the author encourages readers to check out the full reading which is around just 120 pages (Penguin Classics). This amount of reading equates approximately to 700 Facebook posts and almost certainly guarantees an enhanced intellectual experience.

Author's depiction of Plato's Symposium (Illustration by Yung)

From left: Agathon, Alcibiades, Socrates, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Pausanias, Phaedrus

Explanation for illustration: The characters shown are seated according to the arrangement as described in the *Symposium*. The posture of each figure symbolizes their respective theories on Love. For example, Aristophanes entwines his hands together representing the union of two lovers while Eryximachus holds out his hands like a balance that expresses the idea of harmony. The athenian general and famed lover of Socrates, Alcibiades, lounges in the foreground with his weight balanced precariously on an upright bone. This phallic symbol alludes to the carnal side of relationships that both fuels and corrupts love. The doric columns in the background speaks to the dignity of exercising discipline and abstaining from indulgence - which sets the moral tone for the overall art piece.

BE THE FIRST OF YOUR KIND

HOW I INITIATED THE 'STUDENTS ASPIRE CONFERENCE'
BY PHOEBE

My Inspiration - WISE Conference

'Won't you feel ashamed if you are still holding a pipette at the age of 40? Your friends will be rich by then, owning apartments, driving Porsches, and you could still be having a 24 dollar lunch in student canteen.' My friend gave her speech in one breath after I told her I want to continue my future path in scientific research. I kept silent, not knowing how to answer.

Putting this tough question aside, I went to the University of California, Berkeley for an exchange program. Throughout my stay there, I attended many student-organized activities and out of all of them, the WISE CONFERENCE impressed me the most. It was a student-initiated Science Conference that lasted for one day. The aim of the conference was to allow students to learn more about the forefront of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and, to network with professors, industry professionals, and graduate students.

I arrived early. Stepping inside the conference room, there were nearly two hundred people, some were lining up to get their free breakfast, while others have already settled down at their assigned dining table, chatting with each other. I



Phoebe Tong, Founder of the Students Aspire Conference

quickly grabbed my breakfast and sat at my assigned table. At first, I thought everyone came for the attractive free breakfast and lunch provided. To my surprise, everyone was very devoted to the event. Not only did the students take every opportunity to get to know each other, they were also eager to talk to professors. Each Q&A session was bombarded by creative questions regarding stem cells, CRISPR, Cryo-EM...

'What an inspiring event', I thought, after the conference. The idea of organizing something similar in CUHK stirred up in my mind but was rejected right away by my more realistic side. *'It is just another mission impossible. It is just impossible for me to get enough funding for the event, let alone finding suitable speakers.'* I sighed.

Mission Impossible in 'Action'

I went back to Hong Kong, the land of a million buried hopes and unfinished dreams. I met the girl I mentioned at the beginning of this passage again. She too was once a science lover, but as time went by, reality overtook her passion and she eventually decided to enter the business world. Putting her heavy hand on my shoulder, my friend said, *'Think about your future.'*

Interestingly, instead of thinking about my future, I could not stop myself from thinking about organizing a conference in CUHK. Every night as I lay in bed, there were a million thoughts keeping me awake. One day, two days, three days passed...

It was 3 a.m. I woke up from my bed and started to type up the proposal for my 'Conference'. I typed: 'Aim: To motivate undergraduates to learn more about the forefront of STEM, to network with professors....' After a minute of thought, I deleted this sentence and typed, "Aim: To motivate students to chase after their SCIENCE DREAMS.' Instead of having another conventional seminar which teaches solely science knowledge, I believed it is more important to create a 'I DARE' atmosphere. Therefore, I typed my thoughts, my plan, and my mission impossible, all in that proposal.

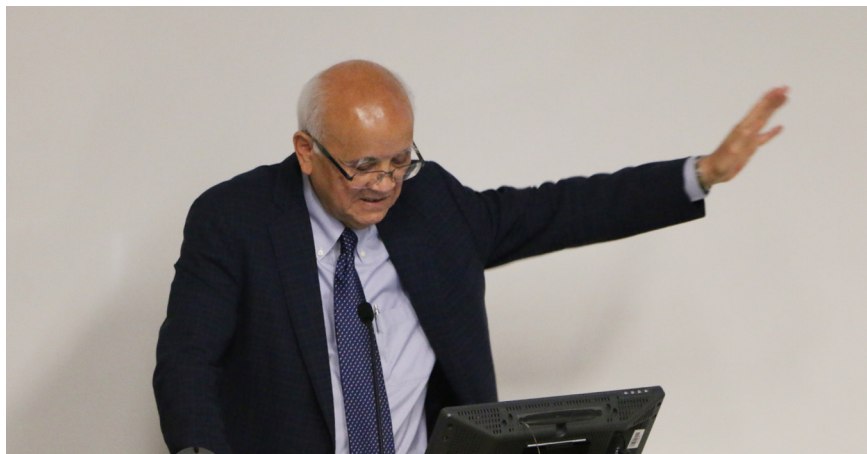
After I finished my proposal, I went to knock on the door of Professor Shaw, the Dean of the Biochemistry Department at CUHK. I presented to him my vision, hoping that he could give me some support and advice. Professor Shaw gave me his full support and promised to fund the conference. He also recommended me to form my own team. Gradually, my mission impossible turned into action.

The 'Sunshine' of Our Show

I looked for students who bore the same aspirations as me to form my team, and we started to plan for the conference. One of our biggest questions was, 'Who should we invite?' Our team wanted to invite some renowned scientists who are at the forefront of their areas of expertise. Therefore, we decided to invite Professor Dennis Lo, Chairman of the Department of Chemical Pathology, and Professor Samuel Sun, the former Chair of the Department of Biology, to be our speakers.

If you've studied Biology, you

must have heard of genetically engineered rice that contains extra vitamin, lysine, and nutrients, aiming to combat malnutrition and increase yield of crops in third world countries. Professor Sun, one of the scientists behind this great



Professor Samuel Sun, the former Chair of the Department of Biology

invention, has spent his whole life in scientific research. We wanted the students to know more about the stories behind this 'Scientific Giant' and therefore, I invited Professor Sun to be our guest speaker. During my discussion with him, he not only showed his full support for the event, but also shared with us some of his stories., 'We did not have enough food in the past... Therefore, I want to devote my life to help the poor farmers.' Those precious 20 minutes were more than enough for me to feel Professor Sun's passion for science.



*Professor Dennis Lo,
Li Ka Shing Professor of Medicine and Professor of Chemical Pathology*

If you've studied Biology, you must also have learnt about the danger of doing amniocentesis in prenatal testing. Preterm labor and delivery, respiratory distress, and postural deformities are some of the possible side effects of doing

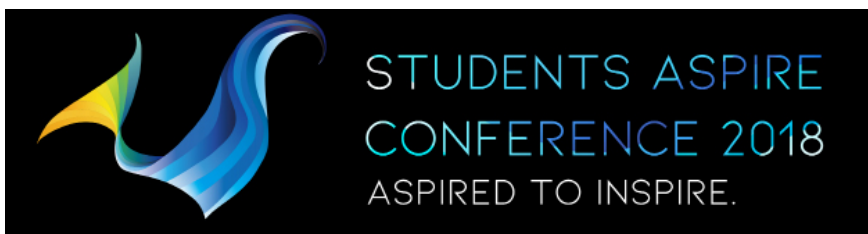
amniocentesis. Yet, the spirit of science is not just to learn, but to discover, to solve existing problems. As a medical student at University of Oxford, this idea was buzzing in the mind of Dr. Dennis Lo. In his research, he discovered the presence of fetal DNA in maternal plasma, and his team saved numerous lives by showing that cell-free fetal nucleic acids in maternal plasma could be used as a noninvasive prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome. Reading about his accomplishments, I felt so inspired, that I decided he must be a speaker at our conference, what

an example he is setting for the aspiring scientists and researchers of our age! My heart was pounding heavily the moment I stepped into Professor Lo's office. I presented to him my vision and expressed my wish of inviting him to be our guest speaker. Looking at our proposal,

didn't seem so out of reach anymore. As I listened to Professor Lo's talk, I could almost see a painter who has devoted his life to his masterpiece. Confident in one's work, passionate for one's job; I believe this is what we all need to learn from Professor Lo.

research, I could feel a passionate man wanting to give sunshine to the farmers, helping them to get more crops.

I was once again inspired by these speakers. From them, I could see passion, confidence and intelligence. It was a day where we could see how these successful scientists went through their ups and downs; it was a day that where we could understand with determination and perseverance, we can also make it – *your dream*.



Professor Lo said, "I have attended a student-organized conference in Taiwan. It was a nice event." Besides sharing with us his experience in Taiwan, Professor Lo also helped us with the name of the conference — 'Students Aspired Conference' — as it is organized by a group of undergraduates who aspired to inspire their fellow classmates. Professor Lo was very supportive of our event and promised to be our guest speaker without hesitation.

We were more than grateful to be able to invite these two 'scientific giants'. Everything was ready and set and we were all very excited about the 'big' day.

The 'Big' Day

The conference kick started with an inspiring talk by Professor Lo. It was one of those talks where no one can fall asleep as all the difficult and complex concepts were presented in a humorous way. Whenever we talk about renowned scientists, we look at their scientific success. However, Professor Lo did not only tell us about his research, but also about his life. Looking at Professor Lo's photos taken in his university era, I felt like I could relate to his experiences; the term 'scientific giant'

After the amazing talk by Professor Lo, we had a tea gathering outside the conference room. Some students grabbed this golden opportunity to talk to these scientists, asking them questions.

After the tea break, we settled down for our next speaker, Professor Sun. Everyone has their own reason for doing scientific research, and for Professor Sun, the reason is simple and strong: he wants to help poor farmers increase the yield of their crops. Professor Sun said, 'I never thought about the patenting of the technique as I only wanted to benefit poor farmers in China.' From the way Professor Sun talked about his

After Thoughts

I completed my mission impossible – I organized this first-of-its-kind science conference in CUHK. I believe Students Aspire Conference is not just about science. It is about every single person who has a dream and is too afraid to go for it. But, if you ask me now, 'Won't you feel ashamed if you are still holding a pipette at the age of 40?' I can answer without hesitation, 'I won't.'

*Be the first of
your kind!*



Students asking questions during the Q&A session



Love.

The force that makes the world go round. The inspiration for many poets and writers. The thing some wait a lifetime searching for. It is a word that has been around since the Ancient Greeks (Eros in *Symposium*) and will likely continue stay an important one in people's lives. Now, self-love is a popular term that gets tossed around in normal conversations nowadays. My question to you is: Do you love yourself?

While you consider the answer to that question, let me clarify that I am not actually here to talk about the art of falling in love, but the art of loving oneself and how it could enhance one's romantic relationship and your relationship with yourself. As for the falling-in-love part, that part should come after you have started to appreciate and respect yourself more.

What is self love? According to *Psychology Today*, self love is not simply a state of feeling good, but a state of appreciation for oneself that grows from actions that support our physical, psychological and spiritual growth. Self-love was first recognised in 1563 but was only later



List three things you feel **good** about **yourself** at the end of every day

Type something....

maintain a degree of space and independence

studied by philosophers William James and Erich Fromm. However, it was only in 1956(!) that loving oneself is 'defined as different from being arrogant, conceited or egocentric'.

Unfortunately, self-love is still often frowned upon in society because it is sometimes assumed that vocalising and strengthening your love for yourself is an act of selfishness or even vanity. But what we sometimes fail to realize is that we cannot exactly treat others with care and kindness when we cannot even extend that same level of compassion towards ourselves. Research shows that self-love can influence

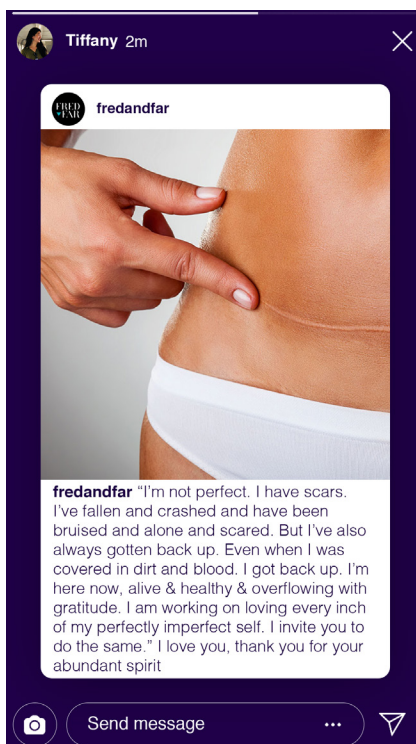
our relationship satisfaction just as much as it affects our partners'. When we are doubtful of ourselves, our insecurities can creep into the way we interact with our significant other, and that can have a negative impact on both parties. We start to rely on the thoughts and wishes of our partners to portray who we are as a person. Yet, your authentic self should be the person they fell in love with in the first place. On the other hand, when we truly love and respect ourselves, we are free from doubt and endless worry, so we trust our feelings and decisions. Self-love allows us to be courageous and authentic in all kinds of relationships.

So then, how do we love ourselves more? The small things and minute changes you make can result in a big difference in how you see yourself. For instance, you could *list three things you feel good about yourself at the end of every day*. As unconvincing as this may sound, it is quite simple, but at the same time, not easy to accomplish.

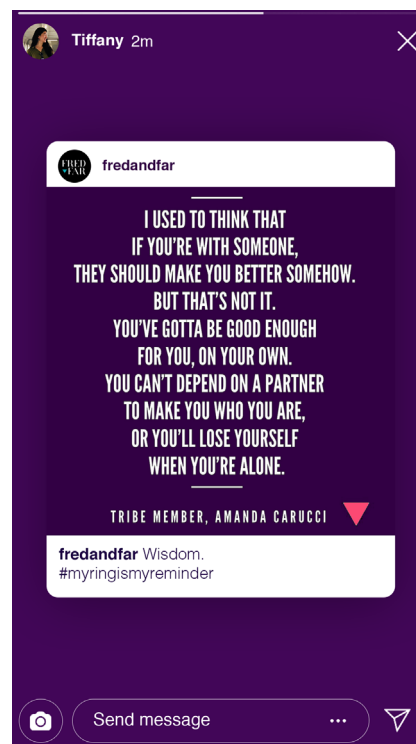
I'm not saying it isn't easy to accomplish because it sounds silly, but because you may find it difficult or even uncomfortable to compliment yourself to begin with as we are not taught to. We are taught to be humble, to see good in others and to compliment them. But what's so wrong about finding the good in ourselves? While I'm not telling you to go off listing and announcing every single thing about you that you think are awesome but I find it important to stress on the fact that we should ensure that same level of fairness when it comes to 'seeing' ourselves.

Being able to see the good in ourselves does not necessarily mean we are narcissistic — it means we understand our own strengths and flaws, and are able to embrace them. As days go by, you will finally learn to appreciate the person you truly are and when you achieve self-verification, you will find yourself less reliant on the validation of your partner and even other people.

People may ask - isn't it easy to confuse self love with self obsession? It seems that in our current world of social media, retouched selfies and daily Instagram stories, there is already enough self love and we are getting a little too self-obsessed? While that is a very valid question and concern, I would not say our world is filled with self-obsessed people. Rather, I would say those who are consumed with filling their social media feed with the best-looking photos to boast their good life are, in fact, lacking self-love in a sort



Credits to Melody Godfred



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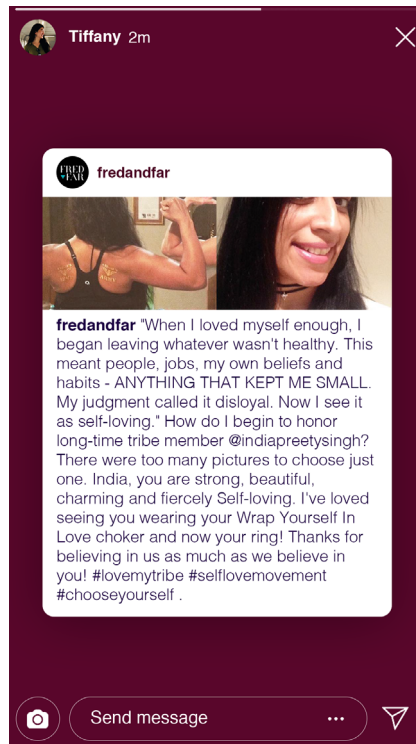
**You could even join
the self-love moment**

AYE

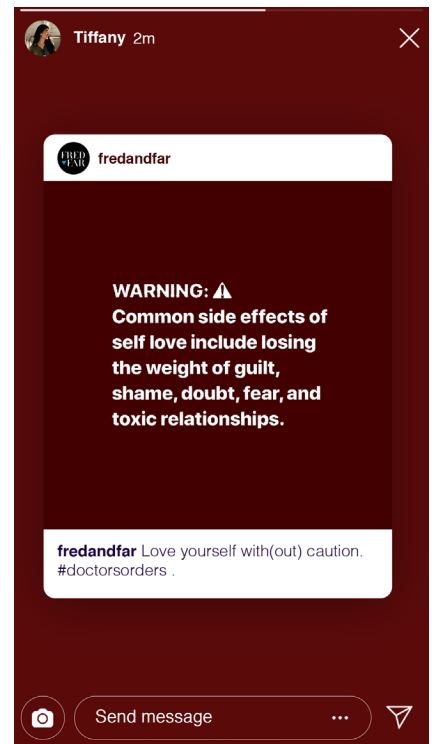
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Credits to Melody Godfred

of way. If you are not a celebrity or an Instagrammer (who depend also on their social media for their earnings) and you really love yourself, your life and appreciate everything that you have, do you really need all the likes and shares to validate how good your life is and how well off you are? You don't. If you do, that, my friend, is a sign of you not loving and appreciating yourself. Because if you truly love the way you look, you do not need the person next to you to validate that. You know that is true (at least for you, it is) and that is more than enough.

Another thing we could do is to *maintain a degree of space and independence*. You know how, in romantic relationships, there is this defining transition for couples when you go from saying 'he/she and I' to 'we' or 'his/her friends and my friends' to 'our friends'. Even though it seems the relationship has gone to the next level of intimacy, it is more ideal to keep your own friends, your own activities, and your own rituals

independent of your partner. Having your own rituals prevents the relationship from absorbing your identity. It also prevents you from basing your life on your relationship, on how much you do as a couple and on how much you don't do as a couple. Personally, I love going to cafes or bookstores to have a little 'me time' to read or even just space out periodically. Being away from other people allows me to understand how I really think of myself, to get away from what other people think of me and see if my thoughts on my life are truly my own.

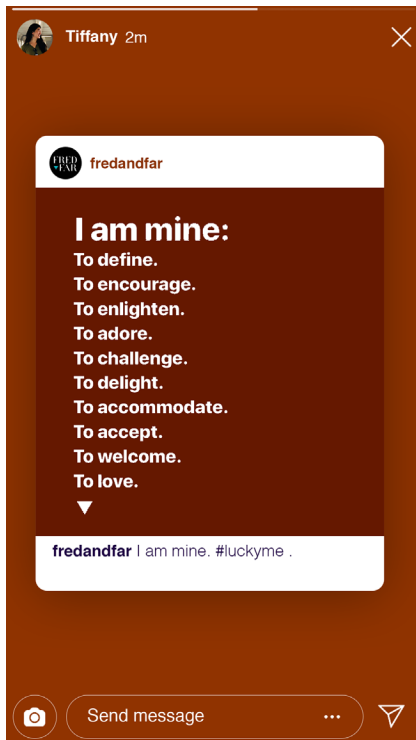
Loving yourself, as I have learnt from people around me, is a lot like loving a partner. Just like we organise activities and arrange surprises to show our significant others that we love and care about them, we need to pencil in self-love rituals for ourselves. Such self-love activities reminds us of our individual purpose and self-worth. When you create space and time in your life for you and show actions of

love towards yourself, you are also sending a message to your brain that you matter, that you're worthy and that you're just as important as your loved ones.

Moreover, healthy independence in your relationship can lead to a deeper connection with your loved one. The time you two are apart allows for the opportunity of self reflection which can give you new perspective that are sometimes only revealed when you give it time (along with some TLC for yourself). Just like the more time you spend with a person, the more and the better you know them. Self-discovery also takes time. When you spend more time with yourself, you get to understand yourself more, what you would like to experience, what you fear and what you really

Choose to be present

100



Credits to Melody Godfred



*Credits to Designecologist
at www.pexels.com*

To support you along your journey of self-discovery and self-love, here's a small part of a self-love poem written by the amazing and wonderful Charlie Chaplin: '... As I began to love myself I freed myself of anything that is no good for my health – food, people, things, situations, and everything that drew me down and away from myself. At first I called this attitude a healthy egoism. Today I know it is LOVE OF ONESELF...'

Lastly, to all those who crave love out there, loving yourself can bring you joy and insight to yourself and the world like no other. People have this impression that we need another person to feel complete in our lives. But is that really true? The answer is up to...

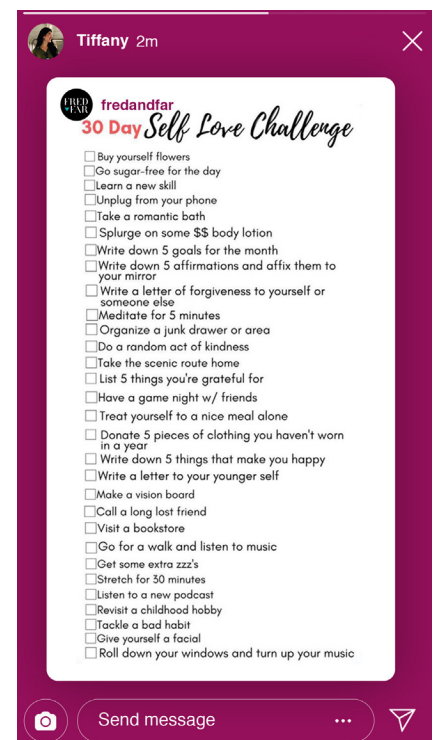
You.

want and need in life. These self discoveries may be the ultimate gifts for you to share with your partner and strengthen your bond with renewed care and understanding of one another.

You could even *join the self-love moment* that has been emerging on the Internet, such as one that is advocated by Fred and Far on Instagram. Both the new-age feminist movement and the mental health awareness have been promoting the idea of self-love. Everywhere around the world, women are realising the importance of learning to love themselves and sharing their stories or their progress of self-love online. They were eventually able to find or develop the right kind of love for themselves and so could you! Try going onto different platforms and reading stories of women who have experienced similar defeat, but were inspired to love themselves and made something of themselves because of it. You could also join the

self-love moment by surrounding yourself with people who appreciate and empower you. Positive energy is contagious: you can inspire and be inspired.

Lastly, remember we are the masters of our own happiness. Choosing happiness means accepting the fact that the only person that can improve the situation is you. Instead of looking to change people around us, we should first focus and work on ourselves. Make sure we meet our own needs first (how else could we meet others' needs if we neglect our own?). Another way to take responsibility for our own happiness is to *choose to be present*. I find myself drained with frustration, anxiety, and worry. These things often come about because I'm consumed by the thoughts of the past or the future, sometimes even both. In context, if we wait for the perfect conditions before we allow ourselves to be happy, then we will always be waiting.



Credits to Melody Godfred

A LOOK AT LOCAL AND GLOBAL INEQUALITY

"It is the mark of a truly intelligent person to be moved by statistics."

- George Bernard Shaw

HONG KONG

Wealth Disparity

In 2016 the median monthly household income of the top 10% of Hongkongers was 43.9 times the bottom 10%. The poorest would have to work three years and eight months on average to earn what the richest make in a month.

(South China Morning Post, 2018)

Health Inequity

The low-cost public healthcare system and services are very much relied on by the general public and lower socioeconomic groups in Hong Kong, as opposed to private healthcare. However, 60% of doctors work in the private health sector, serving only 10% of patients whereas the remaining 40% of doctors work in public hospitals serving as much as 90% of patients. As a result, resources are hugely imbalanced.

(South China Morning Post, 2016)

Gender Inequality

A 2016 census report showed women working in Hong Kong's education sector earned \$9,800 HKD (\$1,250 USD) less than men each month, followed by those in the finance industry where women earned \$8,800 HKD (\$1,120 USD) less than men.

(Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission, 2016)

Racial Inequality

In 2016, 22% of the city's 61,400 South Asians lived in poverty. More than 85% of ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong had not used, or had experienced difficulties using government services due to language barriers.

(South China Morning Post, 2016)

LGBT Inequality

LGBT students received the highest rate of discrimination in Chinese secondary schools with 41% out of 3,040 respondents being told that LGBT people are "psychologically abnormal".

(University of Hong Kong, 2012)

GLOBAL

Wealth Disparity

More than 70% of the world's adults own under \$10,000 USD (~\$78,000 HKD) in wealth. This 70% percent of the world holds only 3% of global wealth.

(Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report, 2017)

Health Inequity

Today, there is a 36-year gap in life expectancy between countries. A child born in Malawi can expect to live for only 47 years while a child born in Japan could live for as long as 83 years. There is no biological or genetic reason for these alarming differences in health and life opportunity.

(World Health Organization, 2016)

Gender Inequality

Among full-time workers in the U.S., women earned less than 81 cents for every dollar a man earned in 2016. Within the OECD group of higher-income nations, South Korea holds the widest gap, with men earning 37% more than women, on average.

(US Census Bureau, 2016 and OECD, 2012)

Racial Inequality

In the US, black children born to parents in the bottom household income quintile (the poorest 20%) have just a 2.5% chance of rising to the top quintile (the richest 20%) of household income. For whites, the probability is 10.6%.

(Chetty, Hendren, Jones, Porter 2018)

LGBT Inequality

Between 2008 and 2014, there were 1,612 murders across 62 countries of transgender persons — equivalent to a killing every two days.

(U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015)

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Volunteer at Crossroads and help distribute quality donations to disaster-stricken communities:
www.crossroads.org.hk

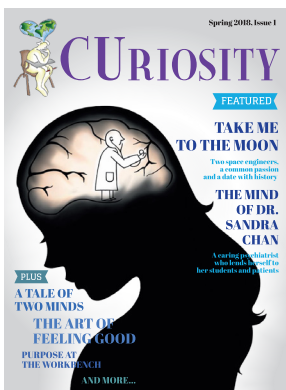
Shop fair trade products and support livelihood empowerment:
www.globalhandicrafts.org
www.hkfairtradepower.com

Provide free tutorial to children from underprivileged families:
<http://hkenc.org.hk/>

Read Sir Michael Marmot's *The Health Gap* and be a better informed citizen in the health consequences of social inequality



CURIOSITY



This July marks the 50th Anniversary of the first manned moon landing by Neil Armstrong and his team. In commemoration of this momentous achievement by mankind, a NASA employee at the time who witnessed Apollo 11's takeoff recorded his first-hand thoughts and experience.

Read Mr. Kitchens' article, and more, from our Issue 1 found at:
www.curiositycuhk.com

Feedback from our readers means a lot to us, tell us what you think at:



<https://bit.ly/2JouR9E>