

Why we shouldn't compare ourselves to others

Have you ever received a compliment, like "Your hair looks nice today", and brushed it off with a "No it doesn't"? Have you ever found yourself looking in the mirror and pinpointing your insecurities? And most of all, have you ever been scrolling on social media and see videos and videos of celebrity photoshoots and ask yourself the same question: Why don't I look like that?

Insecurities. We all have them; or have had them, because as adolescents no one tells us that as we grow older, it becomes easier to put these invasive feelings into a broader perspective. But for teenagers, it's a different story. Though it's part of human nature to relentlessly compare every aspect of ourselves to another person, I believe it has been exacerbated in recent years by social media. Studies show that 40-60% of teenagers feel like insecurity affects their daily life, but I believe the number is a lot higher for those who feel weighed down by insecurity, especially due to the more common "doomscrolling" on the internet.

Firstly, I will talk about the root cause of insecurity: social media. TikToks, Snapchat stories, Instagram reels, while engaging and relatable for many, they brainwash the still-developing minds of teenagers and can create a cyclone of negativity: from normalised cyberbullying to unrealistic influencer appearances. Young people, predominantly girls, are the target market of social media so fall victim to the filtered faces and edited lifestyles that they are exposed to and begin to compare themselves to these influencers, something absurd for someone so young. It can feel like every week, these toxic platforms has given us a new mountain of insecurities and beauty standards ("You must have silky hair. You must have straight, white teeth. You mustn't have acne.") and celebrities make it look like light work to climb all the way up this mountain. Meanwhile, everyone else is left behind, overwhelmed by the expectation to rid themselves of all their natural features in order to be accepted. Influencers and supermodels swipe at, rearrange and camouflage their looks to present a dolled-up version of themselves that poisons the youths' expectations of beauty. But when will we all realise? This mountain is an illusion cleverly crafted by the media; we are all on equal ground, fighting our own battles and forever being our own harshest critic. An influencer life is more like an iceberg: we see the top of the iceberg above the surface and think their whole life is perfect, that they should never have any reason to feel insecure. But if we knew that under the water, the iceberg of their life is full of normal struggles and comparisons to others that we don't see in their posts.

It isn't just teenage girls affected by this issue, you may be surprised to hear that it affects even younger girls, too. Some as young as 7 have foolishly been allowed to download social media at a young age so have been exposed to this modern propaganda from age where their brains aren't even close to being developed fully. Girls are young as 7 have rushed to Sephora, and not for something you'd expect a 7 year old to buy, like a strawberry flavored lip balm, but foundations, powders, bronzers, products with retinol despite their clear and youthful skin. Products with retinol that are designed for people triple their age. Some children are even encouraged to post on social media by their parents, and this is extremely dangerous as they become vulnerable to cyberbullying. If young girls are taught that they must change the way they look, they will believe it and may find that during their teenage years they feel especially held back by insecurity. And if Gen Alpha kids are rushing to grow up, they will have no childhood to look back on.

I am lucky to say that as a child, I didn't have this experience and instead, I read a Roald Dahl book where I came across a quote that resonates with my topic: "If a person has good thoughts, they will shine out of their face like sunbeams and they will always look lovely." At the age I remember this quote from, I didn't think much about the quote but looking back now, I think it is so valuable to remember whenever we feel insecure: no matter how much you think your appearance matters, your personality matters more. A kind person, as Roald Dahl describes, will always be beautiful inside and out. While looks give you a good first impression, the authenticity of your personality sets you apart and gives you a lifetime of joy that following harsh beauty standards won't bring you.

Though I've mainly spoken about social media's impact on teenage insecurity, it is sadly psychology as to why we compare ourselves to others. The Social Comparison Theory by Leon Festinger states that humans have an innate drive to compare themselves to others, in the absence of objective standards. Additionally, the hormone cortisol and low levels of estrogen combine to create a whirlwind of low self-confidence, low self-esteem and inevitably insecurity. So if our brains and hormones aren't on our side, then who is? Well, here's a way to put your emotions back into perspective when you feel insecure. If you think about red cars, you begin to see them everywhere. If you learn a new word, like 'plethora', you begin to see it everywhere also, and it's not because that word is becoming more common, it's because your brain is focusing on something it wouldn't typically dwell upon. Every time you remember this new word or red cars, it will become more engrained in your memory. This applies to looks: if you focus on your insecurities, you will see that in every photo. Every mirror. Every reflection. On the other hand, focus on the features of yourself that you love, or just the joy you felt in the moment when you see a photo of you. That way, you'll see that in every photo. Every mirror. Every reflection.

In conclusion, I think it's important to remember that while society tells us that looks are really important, they truly are nothing compared to the valuable traits like kindness, perseverance and intelligence. Looks fade, but your personality, talents and memories grow and develop as you grow older and understand that dwelling on a photo of yourself you don't like, or feel like you're being fooled by the celebrities who have spent hours and hours with professional makeup artists, is sometimes inevitable, but all the same irrational. Remember: the person you are is so much more than what you look like.

Why Donald Trump is a dictator

Donald Trump has won the US election. And following this, the world has gone to hell with countless migrants in America deported, mass protests in the streets, an all out trade war being started and countless legal battles raging between Trump and the courts over the legality of his actions so far. All this and we aren't even halfway through the first year. But what if I told you that this is worse than it looks, what if I told you that if you look a little under the surface, you can see striking similarities between Trump's actions both past and present and the actions of one of the worst dictators history has ever seen. That Dictator, is Adolf Hitler

The Trump-Hitler comparison is a popular comparison for some and a controversial one for others. This is mainly because comparing Donald Trump to the genocidal maniac that waged war across Europe for six years is extreme. However, there are some disturbing similarities between both these leaders. Exploring these similarities will shine a new and disturbing light on the actions of this new and dangerous administration and will change the way we see Trump's actions and rhetoric.

The main similarity between both Trump and Hitler is how they both unfairly blamed the state of their nations on their opposition. An example of this is how Hitler blamed the so called "November criminals" and the Weimar government (who ran Germany at the time) for the loss in WW1 claiming Germany could have still won the war and that by signing the treaty of Versailles, the government condemned Germany to defeat, betraying Germany and accepting the unforgiving terms set out by the Entente, crippling Germany post war. This is all despite the fact that by November 1918, Germany had lost all chances at winning the war and had no choice but to surrender to the Entente and accept Versailles. Making the Weimar Government and those who signed the treaty (the November criminals) innocent with them having acted to save the nation from more suffering, fighting a war they had no chance of winning.

This is not dissimilar to how Trump has blamed Joe Biden directly for the increase in the cost of living while Biden was in office. Trump has also claimed repeatedly that the economy was terrible under Biden and has blamed the recent issues the economy under Trump has faced on Biden claiming that they are "overhang" from the Biden economy. However, in truth, the cost of living increased under Biden due to factors like covid and the Ukraine war, not Biden's policies. Meanwhile, the number of employed Americans grew from 142.5 million to 159.5 million and average hourly wages in America grew by 19.6 percent, all under the Biden administration. This means that in truth, not only are Trump's claims about the Biden economy absurd, but the Biden economy was also one of the best in recent US history and since getting into office Trump has ruined everything Biden left him in far under a year.

But the similarities don't end there as both Trump and Hitler then promise to fix things, claiming that they will lift their respective countries out of the so-called recession and deliver the nation to prosperity. This is well shown by Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again" as well as Hitler's slogan "work and bread." Both slogans are promises made by both Hitler and Trump to build up their countries from the perceived crisis and to deliver them into a new age of prosperity.

These promises would then get both Trump and Hitler into power with large power bases to rely on for support.

One final similarity between Trump and Hitler is how after getting into power, they both used the propaganda to control the narrative and maintain support.

Hitler mainly achieved this through his propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels and his many successful schemes. One of these schemes was the "People's receiver" scheme where Germans were provided with cheap radios that were tuned to only broadcast Government broadcasts. Due to this, many Germans began listening to the government-controlled broadcasts, slowly indoctrinating them into accepting and supporting the Nazi ideology.

To a lesser extent, this is somewhat comparable to Trump's use of Fox news to constantly shift the narrative no matter the situation or scandal. An example of this is how after Donald Trump had a shouting match with Ukrainian president and certified war hero Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Fox news tried to frame the altercation as Trump trying to push peace. This clearly shows that Fox news intends to portray Trump as an intelligent leader doing what's best for America displaying a blatant attempt by Fox and Trump to shift the narrative to make Trump look better to ensure that Trump maintains his popularity among the American people possibly to ensure his victory in the midterms allowing Trump to maintain his power and enact his selfish plans on America for the rest of his term.

So, what does all this mean? What has this told us about Trump and his administration? It hasn't told us much that we don't already know. However, it has shown us the true character and true goals of Donald Trump. It has shown us clearly and without a doubt that Trump is a selfish, uncaring and narcissistic man who will lie and slander his way into power, ruining anyone who opposes him. It shows us he is a self-centred egotist who will paint himself as the saviour of the state he wishes to destroy, a narrative he will continue to maintain throughout his term to ensure the continued support and adoration of the American people as he ruins their lives and ravages their savings. And it shows us that he is a greedy, corrupt glutton who seeks to use his term in office to benefit exclusively, himself and a few others just as greedy and corrupt as him. Many on the right may try to rationalise his actions, but by comparing him to a man as vile and disgusting as Hitler, we can force even his most devoted of followers to see him for who he truly is. For behind the lies, behind the incompetence, Trump is the man who will burn down the world, just to get himself another dollar.

Why everyone should learn how to play a musical instrument

Can you imagine a life in silence? A life without the art of noise that many revolve their lives around: music.

Cognitive skills

Learning a musical instrument has been proven to dramatically increase people's cognitive skills. For example, playing a musical instrument increases pattern recognition as you would be able to see a series of notes on a page and your brain instantly recognises them as a chord or melody. This isn't just about reading music too, this is also about training your brain to predict and identify sequences which then this skill translates into other areas of life like problem solving. It's like giving your brain a super powered pattern detecting upgrade!

Improvement in memory

Secondly, I'd like to express that learning a musical instrument can greatly improve your memory as playing an instrument significantly enhances both cognitive skills as I explained before and gains muscle memory. To explain, studies show that musicians often have better memory retention and recall abilities, which can aid in academic performance and daily tasks such as remembering why you walked into a room or where you left your phone. Two very forgettable things which I'm guilty of every now and then.

Relaxation and mental health

Thirdly, I'd like to go over the way learning and playing a musical instrument can really impact your mental health in the most positive of ways and help you to relax when stressed, sad or just need a brain break. To explain, in my personal experience I have noticed that whenever I've had a rough day at school or things haven't been going the best I would sit down and shred my guitar or noodle about on the piano which then I notice my mind clears and I feel peace. To explain further, this is because of the dopamine release that occurs when playing and the self-pleasure when you successfully achieve one of your musical goals. This is why playing a musical instrument can be a therapeutic outlet.

Feeling of achievement

Lastly, I'd like to add on the fact that playing a musical instrument gives you a sense of achievement which is no doubt one of the best feelings right? For example, If you were to set yourself a goal for the future such as learning the moonlight sonata 3rd movement on piano by summertime or mastering the hotel California guitar solo by Christmas, when you achieve these goals you feel a huge sense of achievement and also feel proud of yourself which there's no better feeling I would say. In my personal experience, I bought myself a piano around 6ish months ago. Even though I've been a guitarist for roughly 5 years I've always wanted to be able to play piano. I set myself goals to be able to play the piece moonlight sonata 3rd movement by the end of year 11 and I've achieved it just before the end of year 10. The sense of achievement I felt has no words to describe it and I wish for others to feel it too.

Conclusion

Learning a musical instrument can come across challenging or you may feel like it's not for you. But you never know if you don't try right? The cognitive skills, the memory and mental health boost and the sense of achievement are the aspects you will gain from going through with it which isn't exactly something you wouldn't want. From my 5 years of being a musician I can tell you now it's worth it. Give it a try.

EQUALITY ON THE PITCH

Rugby is a dynamic game combining strength, speed and team strategy. It is known for its emphasis on respect both on and off the pitch. Therefore when women run too fast, kick too hard or look too muscular, why are they subjected to abuse?

Imagine trying to juggle being a world class athlete whilst enduring these sexist, demoralising comments on a day-to-day basis.

My passion for rugby first began when I was 8 years old. I had spent every Sunday on the side-lines in the wind, rain and freezing cold watching my brother have the time of his life on the pitch – thundering around the field like a raging bull. One day I said to my Mum “I want to have a go at this.”

I joined Clifton Rugby Club in the under 9s in a mixed team. It was tough. Five girls started and by the next season I was the only girl left. The boys didn't like playing with the girls and made rugby hard to enjoy. However, I did enjoy it – it was thrilling running at people and tackling them to the ground. I didn't want to give up and in hindsight, I genuinely believe that this experience shaped me to be the rugby player I am today.

At U12, I had to change clubs to join an all girls team. I was excited for a new beginning. I now love rugby more than ever. However, I was lucky to have these opportunities, which are not available to many girls. A national survey of England pathway ladies reported that only 14% of girls aged 11-16 have been given the opportunity to try rugby. I accept rugby is not for everyone but it is worrying that we are encouraging the outdated stereotype of girls doing ballet – pirouetting, petite and poised and boys playing rugby – brawny, brutal and brave. At present, there are 7,833 boys teams in the UK and 1,252 girls teams. Times have changed; shouldn't the stereotypes change too?

I have had the pleasure of seeing the positive, life changing effects that rugby has had on girls around me. Rugby has an unseen power that can build confidence, reduce anxiety and build a healthy body image. I have witnessed girls who have severely struggled with their mental health use rugby as a coping mechanism. Within the training environment, girls feel valued and proud of their bodies. Strength is seen as a super power.

It's not just about promoting girls rugby at grass roots level, we must promote it at National and International level. Professional female rugby players who play for England receive a salary for between £26,000 to £32,000 per year. Yet, male professional rugby players who play for England earn around £22,000 per match fee on top of their club salary. This is unfair, unreasonable and unacceptable.

You may say this is due to a lack of interest in the female game but the lack of funding is an unseen barrier to equal representation. Government investment in England's men's team is around £28.9 million. The women's game receives roughly £12.13 million. How can this ever be justified? It can't. The England women last won the world cup in 2014 and are favourites for this year's trophy which contrasts to the men's sole victory in 2003.

It is vital that we use this summer's tournament to our advantage to give our women's rugby players the recognition they deserve.

I am hopeful for change. I am hopeful that my children, whether they are boys or girls will have the opportunity to play rugby. I am hopeful that one day girls playing rugby will be nothing unusual or remarkable and certainly not something which justifies abuse.

Will AI take over the world?

Will AI take over the world?

The year is 2029. The world has been taken over by robotic beings with aggressive artificial intelligence. Can the human resistance go back in time to prevent this? This of course is the once far-fetched 'terminator' made in 1984. However, are we now edging closer to this fictional reality? This may no longer be science fiction and instead science fact. AI can be used to create fake videos, imitate voices and could even be used in war or to spread ~~fake~~ false information on a massive scale.

Artificial intelligence, also known as AI, is changing the world faster than we could have ever imagined. From helping us with our homework to diagnosing illnesses, AI is helping everywhere. However, it isn't just helping, it's also learning and the more it learns, the more power it has. Already 78% of companies use AI globally in some way. This isn't just a number. It's a wake up call. This fact makes it clear how much power AI really has and the more power we give it, the harder it is to take that power back. The question is 'Can we still control it or will it soon control us?'

Experts estimate that there is a 10-20% chance that AI could seriously damage the world in the next few decades. But why? We are growing significantly more reliant on AI as it improves. It currently completes 25% of ~~tasks~~ ^{tasks} that were previously done by humans. Think about that. A quarter of our jobs and tasks. Crene. *click*. Just like that. According to researchers, this could have an impact on 80% of jobs ~~the future~~ ^{the future} ~~for the future~~ ^{for the future}.

good reason. In countries like US and UK, $\frac{1}{3}$ of people are worried AI will steal their job. An even more alarming figure is around 80% of people are worried AI could misuse personal data. Some people are even worried ~~to~~ it could lead to human extinction. AI doesn't think. It doesn't care. It just follows code. Just like the nuclear weapons race in the 1900's, we are speeding ahead without a plan to stop it. We must not make the same mistake again.

It isn't too late. We can still prevent it from taking over if we act now. We need strict regulations and a plan to stop it if it gets out of control. As Stephen Hawking warned in 2014, AI could become a threat to humanity. We need to listen to one of the smartest men to have ever lived. Let's not take his knowledge for granted. The future of AI is filled with potential but also risk so if there is ever a time to act, it's now.

The relationship between parents and children

Good Morning everyone,

Today I'm going to talk about something that affects almost every single one of us - the relationship between parents and children, especially when it comes to discipline. Whether we like it or not, discipline plays a huge role in shaping ~~the~~ we are today, how we think and how we help others. But the way parents discipline their can have both positive and negative effects.

So let's start by talking about what a healthy parent-child relationship looks like. At the heart of it, it's about trust, communication, respect and most importantly love. A good relationship doesn't mean the child gets everything they want or that there are no rules. It just means the child feels safe, supported and heard and heard. When children feel like they can talk to their parents without being judged or yelled at, they are more likely to learn, listen and grow up with a strong sense of proper morals. A healthy relationship balances discipline with understanding.

Discipline when done right, can teach responsibility, respect and right from wrong, but when it's too harsh or inconsistent, it can do the opposite. For example, if parents use yelling, hitting or constant punishment, kids can become, anxious, angry or even resentful. They might start to hide things, lie or act out even more. On the other hand, discipline that's fair and calm - like setting clear boundaries and explaining consequences - helps kids feel more secure and helps them learn from mistakes. The way discipline is disher out determines whether a child turns out polite, kind and mannered or just rude, disrespectful and rowdy.

Let's now get into some actual numbers. According to the American academy of pediatrics, children who are hit regularly are more likely to show signs of aggression and anxiety. In fact, studies show that physical punishment can increase the risk of a child developing mental health issues later in life. Another study by UNICEF found that 6 in 10 children around the world between the ages of 2 and 14 are regularly subjected to some sort of ~~the~~ physical punishment by their caregivers. That's a huge number, but what's even more worrying is that many parents don't realize the long term harm this can cause. Children respond better to discipline when it's based on guidance and understanding.

You might not think about it much, but the way parents discipline their kids can also affect the people around them such as siblings, grandparents and even friends. If a child is being harshly ~~the~~ disciplined, it can ~~create~~ create a tense or uncomfortable home environment for everyone. Siblings might feel scared or unfairly treated, friends might avoid coming over. Sometimes family members disagree on how to discipline children which can cause arguments and distance in the family. It ~~isn't~~ isn't just a private issue - the effects ripple out and affect the whole support system around children.

So what can we do to improve things? First, parents need to learn more about positive discipline methods. That means using things like timeouts, natural consequences, and reward systems instead of fear or punishment. But it isn't just up to the adults. As young adults, we can also speak out - respectfully - when we feel something isn't right. We can also be role models for younger siblings and friends by showing kindness and respect.

In conclusion, discipline is important - no doubt about it. But the way it's done makes all the difference. A healthy parent-child relationship is built on trust and not fear. When done right, it can turn kids into confident, respectful and kind adults. A better future starts with a better understanding of it.

Thank you everyone for listening. Don

Great job!!