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What stories do you want your clothes to tell?

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What stories do our clothes tell? I could never have imagined that my £10 H&M jacket would tell the story of families living in drought and hunger because it was more important to feed a cotton plant than a child. That it would tell the story of a 6-year-old child labourer in Bangladesh, exploited and abused. That it will end its own short story discarded in a landfill of identical jackets.

In our society, consumerism is endemic, infecting our world like a widespread pandemic. According to the Guardian, one in three young women considers garments worn once or twice to be old, with insanely low prices further feeding into this mentality that everything is easily replaceable. Brands like Zara, H&M and Primark exploit this insatiable desire for something beautiful, something aesthetically pleasing, something new - massive billboards flaunting the trendiest clothes adorn our streets, pressuring us to keep up with the Kardashians; advertisements featuring gorgeous models lurk in every corner of social media platforms, with brand new clothes shipped right to your door with a simple swipe of a button. We live in a society of instant gratification fed by the influencers we idolize and the impossible desire for a picture-perfect Instagram grid. What chance does the fate of the planet have against our hunger for self-satisfying egotism?

Eighty billion pieces of clothing are consumed each year, and to mass-produce these clothing to fulfil our unmatched demands, 70 million barrels of oil are used annually to make polyester fibre which takes 200 years to decompose. Excessive water consumption, inhumane levels of carbon dioxide emissions, heaps upon heaps of textile waste plaguing every corner of the planet are mere symptoms of a wider problem: in this outbreak of whirlwind consumption, we have left the environment behind. The culprit: fast fashion companies, who dump one garbage truck's worth of clothing into a landfill every second.

Zara, H&M and Primark… Powerful multinational conglomerate companies have been allowed to get away with this for too long. They do not care about the environment, nor do they care about us. We must no longer hide behind the illusion that these brands want to better our lives by bringing us the latest trends at the lowest prices because if we are implicit in this lie, then we are not just part of the problem - we are the problem.

Big corporations only see the cheques flying in, turning a blind eye to the havoc they are leaving behind: oil spills, rising temperatures, polluted seas that our generation has to clean up. Yet, the governments of developing countries will not keep these big brands in check, for fear of losing a major employer of their people. The governments of developed countries will not keep these big brands in check, for fear of compromising 'economic growth' and 'productivity'. The big sharks on Wall Street will not keep these big brands in check, for fear of watching arbitrary numbers bleed red.

But we, as a generation, are finally realising the damaging impact of our consumerism and are waking up to the power we hold. So, I implore you to be an ethical consumer, a smart consumer. Be a consumer who uses their voice and wallet for good, and pressure these companies into stopping with their unethical business practices, because they only listen to one thing - money. Because right now, they have no incentive to stop razing forests. Because right now as we twiddle our fingers, another shirt is being burnt in a landfill. Because right now, every time you buy from one of these brands, you are condemning our Earth to a fate of fire and fury. Because right now, 300s from when you started reading this essay, 300 garbage trucks' worth of clothing has already been dumped into landfills, infesting every corner of the planet.

Indeed, not everyone is so privileged as to be able to shop from expensive, more ethical brands, but there are always alternatives that don't require a black card for entry. Sustainable and second-hand shopping has become an unstoppable wave, due to increased awareness of deeply-rooted malpractice that plagues these fast-fashion corporations, with thrifting platforms such as ThreadUp, and thrift-flip trends where people tailor second-hand clothes to fit themselves becoming increasingly popular these years. We can donate our clothing to charity shops, such as Goodwill and the Salvation Army. We can avoid online shopping, where same-day shipping means we are ticking closer and closer to an inevitable fate. We can simply wear our clothes longer! These are simple solutions that have to be done before it's too late, before the sea rises and inundates the cities we have spent centuries building.

The issue with fast fashion is systemic, and indeed, an outright boycott could possibly have devastating impacts on the poorest workers, innocent children, who are being exploited by these brands to increase their profit margin. Undoubtedly, the whole situation and the fast fashion industry is extremely complex, and it will not be easy to really acknowledge and solve the core issues laid in front of us. In addition to our physical actions, education and conversation about this are crucial to making a difference. I myself may not be able to do much, but if my essay here has simply made you aware of this horrifying issue, then I have begun to do my part. The small actions of many will add up to make a big difference. It will be a difference that will revolutionize how the fashion industry runs, how we shop, how we live, but to save the environment, to save humanity, it is a change that we must make.

So, the next time you step into H&M again, ask yourself, what stories do you want your clothes to tell?

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Medical Errors: To what extent can doctors be blamed for medical errors?

'To err is human' is the famous quote from Alexander Pope's 1711 Essay on Criticism (Grossman, n.d.). While this is undoubtedly true, just how tolerant the medical profession is to mistakes is something that has come under the spotlight too often in recent years. The case of Dr Hadiza Bawa-Garba which is still active today and has continued to divide the medical community but important to accentuate the need for potential of improvement. Therefore, the role of error can be complex as many can be non-consequential but can also accelerate death. Who is to blame when someone goes wrong? The medical profession isn't a one-person job, being a physician always requires teamwork from all multidisciplinary teams. Therefore, the question of who is solely responsible when one errs isn't as simple to answer.

The GMC revolves around the idea of patient continuity and system responsibility where the whole multidisciplinary team is seen as the care provider rather than just one person. A high-quality handover is identified as one with specific times allocated for members to meet and discuss what actions should be completed. It also puts an emphasis on the need for hospitals to implement their own policies regarding the system of handovers. Medical handovers seem relatively straightforward, however there is a very variable nature to which it can occur depending on the regulation put in place by local guidelines and the situation of the doctor at the time. This is where flexibility in the process symbolises the immense flaw in the scheme of medicine. A key argument regarding this, is whether variety in handovers should be reduced by incorporating standardised procedures and protocols to minimise disparity. Whether this is advantageous or disadvantageous is subjective. Despite the intention behind standardising handovers, the outcome in some cases is not as planned. In 2015, The Joint Commission reviewed a total of 936 sentinel events which concluded that communication was the root cause in more than 70% of serious medical errors. A crucial medical ethic that the profession encourages is patient centred care. By relaying the main aspects of patient care, this becomes the focus, which potentially replaces the need to include the patient who may have a valuable input in the plan of action for their treatment.

Something that has become well established is that many trainee doctors is the struggle with the transition from medical school to starting work due to feelings of unpreparedness for many aspects of their new role. A pivotal argument which supports the notion that doctors are not to blame for medical errors is the infamous system of the August Transition which occurs during this induction period. This is where newly qualified doctors F1 doctors, take up their first post. This transition period has been reported to have a significant impact on patient safety due to lack of support for these new doctors. The odds of death in the patient group admitted to hospital in August was 6% higher than in the group admitted in July.

Medical errors are therefore created through poor induction programme delivery as students are unprepared for dealing with error and lack knowledge of how the clinical environment works. By analysing the initial stage to becoming an official doctor independently working within your speciality we can clearly identify the main factors leading to variations in medical culture and wrongdoings that have been widespread. This is very significant because a hospital environment is one of the most fragile systems of work and to primarily care for the patient but to feel unprepared is something which is a serious problem. On the other hand, working in a profession like medicine where responsibility is in its biggest form could be something anyone finds intimidating at first making it impossible to entirely blame one person or organisation for the feelings of a group of people.

One of the crucial aspects which cannot be overlooked when looking at why medical errors occur are the working conditions of physicians. A systematic review by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality investigated the impact workplace conditions have on patient safety. The investigation found that workloads, work schedules, lengths of work shifts, and stress levels affected rates of non-fatal adverse outcomes, mortality rates, medication errors, and other patient safety measures. Also, the Journal of the Medical Association had published a study involving 17,000 physicians in the training stage and it was revealed that around ¼-⅓ of them had depressive symptoms. This statistic is extremely disturbing to the profession. Another thing to point out is working long hours without a break dramatically reduced doctors' capacity for emotional regulation, most notably the impact on sympathy for the doctor when working with the patient. This is potentially more common amongst junior doctors. Firstly, it starts out with hints and signs of stress which include frequent absence. This is referred to as intellectualisation which acts as a defensive strategy by ignoring the impact of your actions on one's feelings but rather only focusing on the intellectual aspects of a situation, referred to as a 'catastrophic erosion of empathy' (also human). The prospect of having sympathy with your patient and ensuring that you are on the same terms with the patient is the basis of a good patient doctor relationship.

Despite the ideology that a doctor is the most important primary source of care, it's important to note the roles and input of the whole multidisciplinary team and procedures involving the care of a patient should not be overlooked. By ignoring the lack of regulations and potential risks to a doctors or students health and safety can have an even more widespread detrimental impact on patient wellbeing and equally devastating for those subjected to blame. As a result, it can be confidently concluded that doctors can't be directly blamed for medical errors caused within a medical environment.

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Linguistics in Gaming

We are living in a time where the internet connects us globally and instantaneously, an environment where users are entirely free to choose how they portray themselves due to the anonymity that the online world provides. As a consequence of the influx in technological innovations throughout the past few decades, we are all now well familiar with terms such as the 'metaverse', (virtual worlds specifically designed to cultivate social connections), in addition to this, internet users have subconsciously mastered the unofficial language of 'text talk', a phenomenon especially prevalent amongst the younger generation. Furthermore, many of us have friends that we solely know in cyberspace and numerous amounts of these connections are established and cultivated within multiplayer gaming platforms that allow players to share and collaborate in virtual experiences together. These virtual games have spiked in popularity, becoming a common pastime for todays youth, therefore they are having a great impact on society, catalyzing evolution in many linguistic fields.

When entering these united online communities of gamers, one of the most notable differences in comparison to typical linguistics is the heavy use of colloquial language and slang. Abbreviations incomprehensible to outsiders such as 'GG' meaning good game and 'AFK' signifying away from keyboard, aid gamers to form relationships based upon their shared interests. These colloquial phrases connect these specific communities helping one to identify who they share common ground with by the equivalent language they use. Many language rules are also thrown out the window and replaced with unconventional punctuation as online there is no limit on the number of question marks used, symbols are also used instead of words and various other exceptions to grammar also exist. While it may be expected that these idioms and unconventional spellings might create a divide between gamers and the rest of the population, this doesn't occur. This can be explained by the code-switching theory as language users alter their use of language based on the situation they are in and who is present meaning slang is only utilized around others familiar with it so as not to confuse or off-put others unfamiliar with it, particularly in more formal situations.

Besides the many positives of shared language learnt online bringing individuals together, there is a sinister side to these web spaces, like any place elsewhere gender bias and discrimination is still present and problematic. The majority of these video game communities are made up of males and in yet another male dominated sector, sexism thrives in a multitude of ways: characters in games are often men and the odd character that is female is often sexualized and inferior, on top of this, most game developers are also male due to masculine stereotypes within the computer science field repelling women from taking part. A combination of the anonymity that these online accounts provide and the majority of users being male makes women an easy target, forced to bare the brunt of abusive language constantly normalized and barraged against them. Derogatory language used in conversation is intensified by the violent environments of these games, language is shaped by the environment and in the midst of violent matches, taboo language is common and women are often victim to these unnecessary insults.

In my personal experience offensive conversations like this occur too often, it is possible, even common to be insulted on your appearance in spite of it being anonymous and non existent on digital platforms. This derogatory language follows a pattern, it is gender specific and often mentions appearance, something women are constantly put down for. Personally speaking although males and females are in the same speech community using mutually accepted language, men greatly

differ from women in the way they use language in order to harness their power over women. Not only do the majority of men use insults to knock women's confidence brutally forcing themselves up to the higher status in virtual conversations, they also dominate the conversation by talking for longer on average and often interrupt others, especially women, with no care. This observation I've made online is supported by the dominance theory proposed by Pamela Fishman, who investigated the power imbalance between men and women in the real world and found that men controlled the language system by talking over women and for longer periods of time.

Aside from the various problems women experience in the online world we still continue to use these platforms due to the various advantages that come along with them. Gaming is modernizing the art of storytelling and taking the world by storm, it brings new elements into well worn narratives, giving the audience an experience of immersion as never seen before. The interactive nature of technology allows for players to completely experience another perspective and connect with a virtual environment, being a part of a story they would never have undergone without this medium. Gaming has become a form of escapism due to it's interactivity, mixed with the narrative weaved into slower paced storytelling games ensuring players are engaged and immersed in the story shown and told through the screen. Gaming has also become an unexpected catalyst for language learning, the mix between reading and listening improves players comprehension skills allowing for more international connections through language in the real and online world.

In conclusion, gaming is revolutionizing the art of storytelling, creating international conversation and establishing a new form of language, in addition to this it's becoming a part of learning, positively impacting and connecting people all over the world. While all these changes are beneficial and favorable some features such as gender bias remain as old and unjust as ever and we can only hope that the future will bring more women to the gaming industry, encouraging other young women to join and speak out against sexism. This in turn will hopefully shift the gender bias of language online creating more open conversations allowing women to add their own dimensions within the evolution of language used on these gaming platforms.

To what extent do companies and websites breach ethical guidelines to obtain information from users?

The average website has twenty three different cookies stored, most of which are from third parties. Cookies are files stored on a website's servers that contain information regarding the user of the website. They allow the user to remain signed into the website on their next visit and they allow for a more personalised experience as the information collected is analysed to recommend content that is relevant to the user. On the surface, it may seem that cookies are great for both the web developers and the user; they allow web developers to understand their demographic as more information is stored. However, when a user clicks the "accept" button, they are agreeing to much more than they expect.

When a user allows a website to track their cookies, although they may assume their information will only be shared once to one website, this is not the case. When a user shares their cookies, they agree to share their information every time they visit the website. The website recognises the user and tailors advertisements that relate to their searches. Furthermore, the information obtained by the website is then sold, bought and even auctioned by third parties without the user's knowledge. These third parties buy the users' information from several websites allowing for a detailed insight into the user.

The information collected by websites ranges from a user's interests in movies and music, to their favourite meals to eat and, although this information may seem unimportant when compiled and shared among websites, third parties are able to make assumptions about a user's age, sex and even their relationship status. An example of information collected about a user is the Ad Personalisation Page which Google has on users. This has enabled personalised ads to be targeted at individual users. The page displays assumptions Google has made on the user based on their searches such as their age, level of education and parental status and can be accessed by the user to view what assumptions have been made about them.

Although many users may not be aware or comfortable with the fact that websites log their internet activity, it can be argued that before a website is able to access the information of the user, the website must ask for the consent of the user and, therefore, the responsibility lies with the user to protect their information. However, most websites utilise poor graphic design on their website purposefully to avert users from rejecting cookies by creating banners that are difficult to manage and highlight the "accept" button while concealing the "reject" button. This is not only an ethical issue but also a legal

one. Europe's General Data Protection Regulation introduced rules which detailed how websites must design consent banners that are easy to navigate and present the "reject" button just as easily as the "accept" button, as well as making consent explicit. Although this law was introduced in 2018, according to a study done by MIT CSAIL, University College London and Denmark's Aarhus University, only 11.8% of the most used consent management platforms meet the minimum requirements according to GDPR. Furthermore, from the 10,000 websites used in the study, more than half did not offer a "reject cookies" button. It was also found that concealing the "reject" button resulted in a greater number of users consenting to share their information.

Despite websites not abiding by the regulations set for them, it can still be argued that users are responsible for protecting their own privacy and, although difficult to access, the option to decline cookies is still accessible. Although users have the choice of consent to maintain their privacy, an experiment conducted by artist Risa Puno revealed that people are willing to give up their information easily for small rewards. The artists asked the attendees of an art festival to reveal personal information in exchange for a cookie. The information ranged from their address and phone number to their fingerprint. 380 attendees revealed personal information, while 162 shared the last four digits of their social security number. Although some of the information such as the social security number cannot be confirmed, other personal information such as their fingerprint cannot be fabricated. The experiment revealed that people are more willing than expected to share information. However, it is unclear whether this information was shared due to the people's lack of care for privacy or possibly their lack of awareness regarding the topic of cookies and privacy, as well as being unaware of the value of their personal information.

In conclusion, it is both unethical and against regulations for websites and companies to purposefully design their websites in a manner that averts users from accessing the "reject" button while encouraging users to click the "accept" button through the use of graphic design as this evidently influences the user's decision. While acknowledging the liability of tech companies and the responsibility they have to ethically obtain consent from users, it cannot be denied that to a certain extent users also have a responsibility to ensure that they educate themselves on how to protect their information and understand what they are consenting to when accessing websites.

To what extent was the war on drugs an intentional form of systemic oppression the late 20th century?

The war on drugs in the United States was an undeniable failure in every way. The initiative's inception in 1971 carried the promise of the end of the illegal drug trade, drug abuse and drug related violence - issues that plagued inner-city communities across America. Instead, it was littered with constant policy failures, and the unmitigated detrimental effects of these failures were utterly damning over the decades that ensued. Some argue that these issues were merely the side effects of the attempts to prevent the growth of the drug trade. It has become evident, that these effects were part of the aims of the drug war. The initiative is now widely considered to be an oppressive and destructive crusade against fair justice, as well as the dignity, ambition and perception of the working class and minority driven communities.

On June 17, 1971, then-President Richard Nixon proclaimed that drug abuse was 'public enemy number one'. From this point onward, the war on drugs ensued with the objective of eradicating the issues that are claimed to stem from the drug trade. The reality of the Nixon administration's motivation for introducing the war on drugs, though, was revealed by Nixon's domestic advisor, John Ehlirchman. In 1994, he admitted "the Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people… We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin. And then criminalising both heavily, we could disrupt those communities… Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did".

The reasoning for the intentionally deceitful and discriminatory nature of the drug war can be found when examining America's social and political issues at the time. During the 1960s and 70s, the U.S

was in the midst of dealing with the perceived threats of the civil rights movement, revolutionary groups and the rising number of people aligning themselves with left-wing, anti-American sentiments. The war on drugs was initiated to treat 'hippies' and black people as drug users, criminals and enemies to the progression and foundation of American societal values. It is clear, therefore, that the war on drugs stems from a desire to systemically and unjustly oppress those deemed as America's enemies.

Whilst punitive attitudes towards drug users and possesses began to develop during the Nixon regime, the drug war did not come into full effect until the presidency of Ronald Reagan. His two-term presidency (from 1981-1989), saw the war on drugs expand vastly and resulted in the war on drugs becoming prominent and hugely punitive. Media outlets also spread propaganda to increase the public's discontent with the illicit drug trade. They did so by creating stereotypes of users of crack cocaine and of people of colour. These stereotypes reinforced the bigoted views of the public, and the propagation of them was central to Reagan's aims.

As referenced earlier in this essay, America was coming off the back of racial and working class movements such as the perceived threat of the Black Panther Party. It was also in the midst of the Cold War, and the weaponisation of stereotypes of black and hispanic populations were instrumental in allowing the government to introduce policies that were inherently oppressive to inner-city communities filled with black and hispanic people. The U.S used anti-hispanic sentiments from the drug war to oppress hispanic people in the country and to gain support for imperialism in Central and South America, as it sought to oust many of the left-wing governments in the region, with the superficial motives of stopping the entry of drugs into the United States. It did this whilst also introducing laws and attitudes that resulted in black people being imprisoned at a disproportionate rate and treated with prejudice by the state.

With the support of much of the American public, Reagan's reign would result in what we know as the war on drugs today. From 1980 to 1988, prison populations increased by 90%, and this went hand in hand with the disproportionate treatment, policies and justice that debilitated many working class black and hispanic communities - for example, the difference in the sentencing of crack and powder cocaine. Crack cocaine was more prominent in inner-city communities, whilst powder cocaine was used by white people, often of a higher class. The possession of five grams of crack meant an automatic five-year sentence while it took 500 grams of powder cocaine to trigger that sentence. As a result, black and hispanic people were sentenced far more often and for far longer. Such judicial disparities were not accidental, and aimed to ensure the perpetuation of America's position as a global, white-led superpower.

The war on drugs and the increase in incarceration rates continued to increase under the presidencies of George Bush and Bill Clinton between 1989 and the end of the century, with the stringent drug policies and stances that marked the Reagan era adopted by his successors and with the introduction of the 1994 Crime Bill. This brought in more aggressive policing, longer prison sentences and even higher incarceration rates. which further exacerbated the oppression faced by disadvantaged communities.

It is undeniable, therefore, that the war on drugs was an attack on the integrity of American values. It was characterised by lies, injustices and discriminatory policies that aimed to systemically target mostly innocent and already tyrannised working class black and hispanic communities. It culminated in devastating levels of damage to victims and sufferers of the drug trade and the dire socioeconomic conditions that contributed to its prominence. Whilst the drug war did not fulfil the claimed aims of reducing the drug trade and the issues surrounding it, it met its true aim - the systemic oppression of perceived threats to the American state.