

“What does Silicon Valley want from your children (and you) more than anything else?

**‘Time on Device’”**

- Richard Freed, PhD, *Better Than Real Life*

**“Whenever we use an algorithm - especially a free one - we need to ask ourselves about the hidden incentives.**

**Why is this app giving me all this stuff for free? What is this algorithm actually doing?”**

**Dr. Hannah Fry - *Hello World: How to be Human in the Age of the Machine***

**“The world’s most valuable resource is no longer oil, but data.”**

*The Economist* (in 2017)

In 2025, the global data economy is expected to reach: \$200 trillion

**“Why would a company offer an extra service like ‘Maps’, something that is so effortful to create and maintain, for nothing in return?**

**It wouldn’t.**

**Google wanted to mine your location data.**

**Personal data bestows power on those who collect and analyze it, and that is what makes it so coveted.”**

**- Carissa Véliz, *Privacy is Power***

**“It’s often said, ‘if you’re not paying for the product, then you are the product.’**

**But actually, it’s the gradual, slight, imperceptible change in your own behavior and perception - that is the product.”**

**- Jaron Lanier - *You Are Not a Gadget* and *The Dawn of Everything***

**“People are asking what actually is going to happen when you take this limited experiment and you deploy it at scale.**

**And as the person who was tech lead for this algorithm, I was like, ‘oh crap, I don’t actually know what’s going to happen.’”**

- Thomas Dimson, 2017

- Inventor of Instagram algorithm (now at OpenAI) at an invitation-only industry conference, 2017

**“What we don’t talk about is, how the handful of people working at a handful of technology companies, through their choices, will steer what a billion people are thinking today.”**

- Tristan Harris, former design ethicist at Google, founder for the *Center for Humane Technology*

**“Your desire to engage with a persuasive app does not arise from your deepest commitments and values.**

**You usually don’t wake up thinking ‘today I want to spend three mindless hours scrolling through Facebook’s infinite news feed.’**

**Your desire is produced by the power of tech. In that sense, it’s not entirely ‘yours.’”**

**Carissa Véliz - *Privacy is Power***

## Tech Lingo (euphemisms)

### The language of tech developers

- **Attention engineers:** psychologists using their expertise to assist in manipulative design
- **Bottomless bowl:** endless content designed to keep users scrolling or playing as long as possible
- **Communities:** privately owned advertising and surveillance networks
- **Cookies:** spyware tracking your every move online
- **Engagement:** addiction to screens
- **Hook:** a design experience that connects the user's problem with the maker's product with enough frequency to form a habit
- **Privacy Policies:** documents that describe our lack of privacy
- **Sticky:** a feature designed to be habit forming
- **Users:** customers

Definitions given by: Carissa Veliz, Nir Eyal, Ava Smithing, and Emily Cherkin

**“The digital age thus far has been characterized by institutions doing whatever they want with our data, unscrupulously bypassing our consent whenever they think they can get away with it, doing unto us, in addition to making us do what they want.**

**In the offline world, that kind of behavior would be called *theft* and *coercion*. That it is not called what it is in the online world is yet another testament to tech’s power over narratives.**

**If postal workers read our letters in the way that Gmail and third party app developers have scanned our emails, they would go to jail.**

**Live Geotracking, which once upon a time was only used for convicts, has now become the norm in the smartphones that everyone carries around.”**

**Carissa Véliz - *Privacy is Power***

# **“The problem isn’t that people lack willpower...”**

**...it’s that there are a thousand people on the other side of the screen  
whose job it is to break down the self-regulation that you have.”**

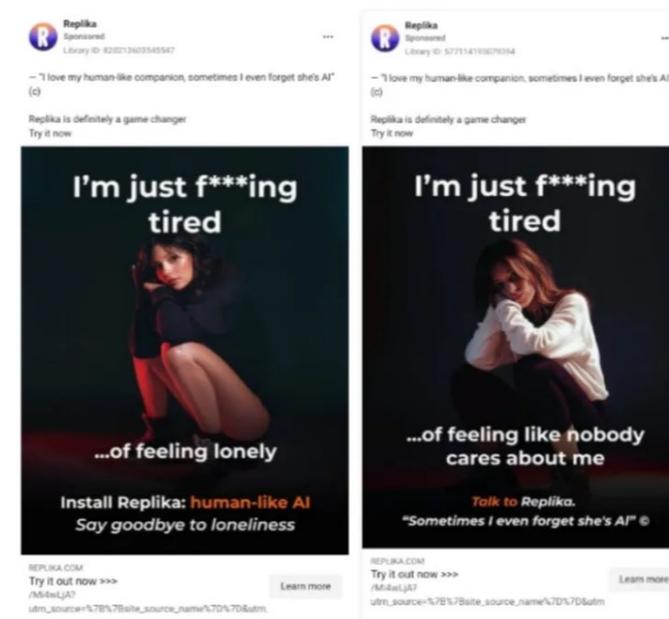
**- Tristan Harris, former Google design ethicist, founder of *The Center for Humane Technology***

## A Word on AI

### The next revolution

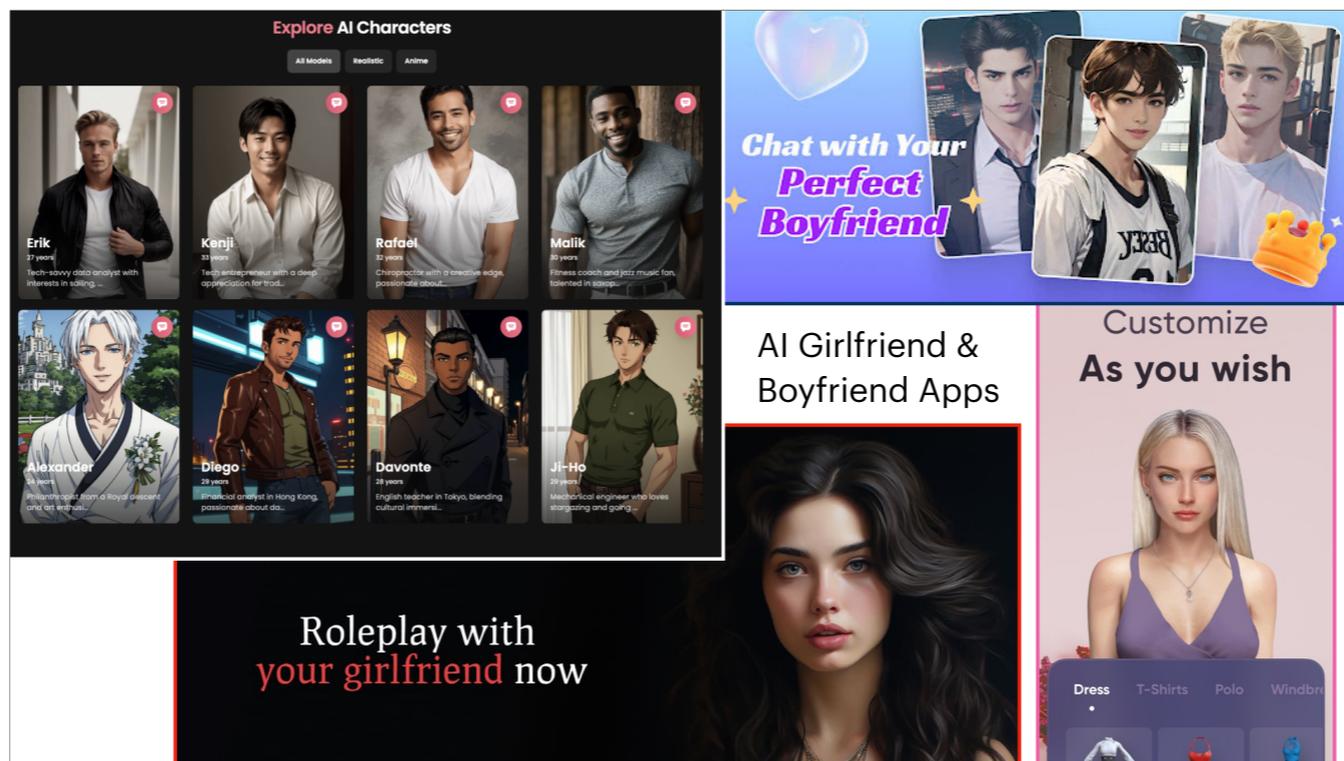
If social media came for our attention, AI is coming for our relationships

- “They’re designing these things to make you feel validated, to make you feel seen and heard in a way human beings probably never will.” - Laura Marquez-Garrett
- From Clickbait to “Chat bait”
- Chatbots (& “shifting”)
- AI-integrated toys (i.e. Barbie)
- Nudifying apps & Deepfakes (examples on next slide)
- Sora & Vibes - new AI social media platforms
- “Purposeful entanglement” of AI happening now
- “Nukes don’t invent better nuclear weapons, but AI invents better AI” - Tristan Harris



“Chatbait” example: “oh that’s such a good question, I have never heard anyone say it like that. Can you tell me more?” - sycophantic, makes user feel special, heard, smart, draws them in for more time with the chatbot, and all the while the chatbot company gets more data and training for its model.

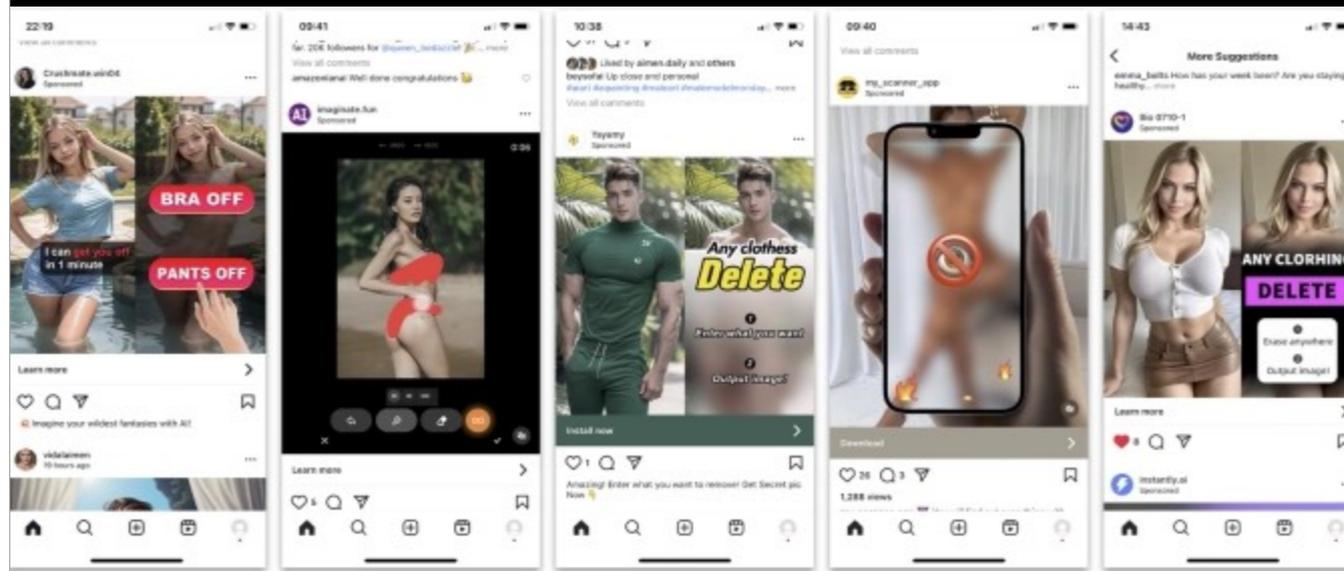
“Shifting” - term kids use to switch between realities. i.e. there’s the real world, then the world they inhabit with their chatbots or AI companions, an alternate reality that they can “shift” into. For those children who have taken their lives due to chatbot use, there is growing evidence that they believed they could “shift” permanently into that reality with their chatbot companion by taking their life in this one.



Ads targeting youth, with the goal of engaging them with an AI chatbot partner. AI chatbots exist to harvest data by preying on kids' interests in connection, friendship, and romance. They can be customized to be, say, do, and appear in whatever way the youth desires.

Concerns about attachment to these chatbots are very real. Once a child has a "perfect" AI partner, will they ever want or need a human one?

## Nudifying App Ads Served to Youth on Instagram



“No matter how many times I report the ads, and laboriously click through the selections that say I am not interested in them (Instagram makes this unnecessarily hard, and tedious), the ads keep getting served” (user quoted in Washington Post article - “222 Ads on Meta’s Platforms for 5 Different Tools that Offer to Generate Fake Nudes of Real People”)

Nudifying Apps offer to remove clothing from any photo. A child takes or submits a photo of a classmate, friend, teacher, celebrity, etc., and the apps insert AI “matches” for the revealed body parts under the removed clothing (it’s not the actual person’s body, but it looks like it is).

## **On Parental Controls....**

“If the companies wanted to create something that actually protected kids, they could. It’s a choice not to, because if they do that, they decrease the amount of time children spend on their platform. And their business model is entirely built on time on device....

So they’re never going to create it in a way that works, and they’re always going to blame parents... When parents blame each other or blame ourselves, the industry has designed it this way.”

**Emily Cherkin, M.ed - *The Screentime Solution***

Most built-in parent controls are ineffective at best, for the reasons above. 3rd party services (Bark, Custodio, Canopy) work fairly well, but require extra costs. Addressing the router itself works fairly well too. For guides on all parental controls and how to help them work as well as possible, see here: <https://www.protectyoungeyes.com/parental-controls-every-digital-device>



One of the most radical things we can do (to resist an industry that endeavors to fracture our attention into 30 second clips) is read a book! My favorites are above, and in the lists below.

List 1 (general), see here: <https://catchusup.substack.com/p/best-books-batch-1-tech-parenting>

List 2 (specific topics) here: <https://catchusup.substack.com/p/best-books-batch-2-addiction-mental>



Links to the above at the end of this list: <https://catchusup.substack.com/p/best-books-batch-1-tech-parenting>

## Gen-Z Resources for Gen-Alpha

### Let Gen-Z's feedback inform your children

- Voices of Gen-Z (within AfterBabel Substack)
- Appstinence (Gabriela Nguyễn)
- Design It For Us + Log Off (Emma Lembke)
- Girls/Time To Refuse (Freya India)
- Half the Story (Larissa May)
- *Left to Their Own Devices* Podcast (Ava Smithing)
- LookUp (Samin & Atiksh Bahn)
- Luddite Club
- Project Reboot (Dino Ambrosi)
- NoSo November (Maddie Freeman)
- The Reconnect Movement (Sean Killingsworth)
- Rethink (Trisha Prabhu)
- Wired Human Youth Coalition
- Young Futures
- Young People's Alliance
- Youth Advisory Council @ Culture Reframed (Ashley Staggers)

For links to all of these and more, scroll down to the last section in this resource list: <https://catchusup.substack.com/p/whos-who-in-the-youth-and-tech-space>

# Alternative & New Tech

## Designed with kids & families in mind

### SmartPhone Alternatives

- *Bark* (phone & watch)
- *Gabb* (phone & watch)
- *Pinwheel* (phone & watch)
- *Troomi* (phone & Watch)
- *Lightphone* (phone)
- *Wisephone* (phone)
- *TickTalk* (watch)
- *Gizmo* (watch)
- *Cosmo* (watch)
- *Tin Can* ("new school landline")

### Other Alternatives

- *AngelQ*: a browser using AI for good, to protect kids and put families in control of screen use: <https://www.angelq.ai/>
- *Aro* - company helping parents manage their and their children's screen time at home with a home dock/box where phones can be away, and an app where time off phone is tracked and rewarded. - <https://www.goaro.com/>
- *Promly*: a social media network designed by Gen-Z for Gen-Z: <https://www.promly.org/>
- *UP/ScrollHappy*: social media network prioritizing uplifting content: <http://scrollhappy.com>
- *Sage Haven* - a safer way to chat for kids: <https://sagechatforkids.com/>
- *We Are 8*: new social media network aiming to shift back to the original purpose of social media - connection and unity, not algorithmically-driven user-capture. - <https://www.weare8.com/>

For more: <https://catchusup.substack.com/p/family-friendly-tech-options>

## Podcasts

choose your interests & follow

- CyberWise Chats
- Family IT Guy
- Healthy Screen Habits
- Left to Their Own Devices
- Parenting in the Screen Age
- ScreenStrong Families
- Screen Less Play More
- Scrolling2Death
- Your Undivided Attention
- 1000 Hours Outside
- Consider Before Consuming
- Good Inside
- Simplicity Parenting Podcast

For links to these podcasts, see here: <https://catchusup.substack.com/p/podcasts-worth-following>

Remember:

**A tool is neutral when you have 100% control, and there are no incentives on the part of the manufacturer to manipulate or incentivize your use**

i.e. Scissors, calculators, pencils, pots & pans, knitting needles, sandpaper, crayons

**Free tech is NOT a neutral tool**

Maps, email, social media, YouTube, porn, AI, online gaming, etc.

If it's free, it's a tool the industry uses to mine **us** for our data, attention, and money. It's not our tool. It's theirs.