A Further Inquiry 2

Secular Humanism, AI, Global Politics, Public Health, Relationships, and Human Rights



Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Forewords by

Mathew Giagnorio and Khadija Khan

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Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 8, 2026

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Foreword: Mathew Giagnorio, Editor-in-Chief (A Further Inquiry)

There is a temptation in every age to mistake information for understanding.

Never has humanity possessed more immediate access to knowledge while simultaneously appearing less certain about what knowledge itself demands. We inhabit an era of endless commentary, algorithmic outrage, partisan certainty, and ideological performance. Every event is immediately categorized, every opinion instantly amplified, every disagreement transformed into moral theatre. Yet beneath this deafening noise lies a quieter question, one that has always defined civilization at its best:

How do we know what we claim to know?

That question is the beating heart of Scott Douglas Jacobsen's work.

A Further Inquiry 2 arrives at a time when certainty has become fashionable and genuine inquiry increasingly rare. Rather than offering readers another manifesto or ideological blueprint, Jacobsen presents something considerably more difficult, and ultimately more valuable. He offers conversation. Not conversation as confirmation of existing beliefs, but conversation as intellectual labour: the willingness to encounter complexity without immediately reducing it to slogans.

Across these pages the reader encounters scientists, physicians, humanists, activists, entrepreneurs, journalists, educators, policy thinkers, and public intellectuals whose experiences span continents, cultures, disciplines, and political realities. The subjects range from artificial intelligence and evidence-based medicine to geopolitical conflict, secular humanism, public health, relationships, misinformation, technological change, and democratic resilience. At first glance these topics appear disconnected. They are anything but.

Each represents a different front in the same civilizational struggle: whether modern societies can continue making decisions grounded in evidence, intellectual humility, and respect for reality itself.

That struggle increasingly defines our time.

The challenge facing liberal democracies is no longer merely political. It is epistemological. Institutions rise or fall according to whether citizens can distinguish expertise from performance, evidence from assertion, persuasion from propaganda, and inquiry from activism. Public trust is not restored through louder rhetoric but through patient investigation, methodological integrity, and an openness to being corrected by facts.

Jacobsen understands this.

His interviews rarely seek dramatic confrontation. Instead, they reveal something more enduring. Given sufficient time, thoughtful questions often produce more illuminating answers than adversarial debate ever could. In allowing experts to explain their work on their own terms, he demonstrates confidence in the reader's capacity for independent judgment, a confidence increasingly absent from contemporary media.

There is also something distinctly humanistic about this collection.

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Humanism, properly understood, is not merely disbelief in the supernatural. It is a commitment to human dignity grounded in reason, compassion, intellectual freedom, and the continual testing of our assumptions against observable reality. It recognizes that our differences, political, cultural, religious, or philosophical, need not prevent shared inquiry into questions that affect us all.

That spirit permeates this volume.

Whether discussing Māori identity, colorectal cancer screening, AI's impact on younger generations, the consequences of war, therapeutic practice, or the economics of emerging technologies, Jacobsen consistently returns to a simple proposition: understanding requires listening before judging.

This is not neutrality masquerading as wisdom. Nor is it an avoidance of moral responsibility. Evidence does not eliminate ethical judgment; it disciplines it. Democratic societies cannot make sound moral decisions if they first abandon the habits that allow truth to be distinguished from error.

The collection therefore serves another purpose beyond documentation.

It quietly reminds us that civilization depends upon institutions of inquiry every bit as much as institutions of power. Universities, independent journalism, scientific research, public health, open debate, and evidence-based policymaking are not luxuries of stable societies. They are among the conditions that make stability possible.

Their preservation requires citizens willing to think before reacting.

Readers familiar with Jacobsen's work will recognize another defining characteristic: intellectual generosity. Even when interviewing individuals whose conclusions differ substantially, he seeks first to understand rather than caricature. Such generosity should not be mistaken for credulity. It is instead an expression of confidence that rigorous questioning ultimately strengthens good ideas while exposing weak ones.

In an age increasingly dominated by algorithmic incentives that reward outrage over nuance, such confidence is quietly radical.

A Further Inquiry 2 does not promise final answers. Indeed, its greatest strength lies in resisting that temptation altogether. It instead models a disposition, one that prizes curiosity over certainty, evidence over ideology, dialogue over tribalism, and intellectual honesty over fashionable consensus.

That disposition deserves renewed appreciation.

The future will undoubtedly present challenges even more complex than those explored here. Artificial intelligence will reshape labour and education. Geopolitical competition will redefine alliances. Public health will confront new crises. Democratic institutions will continue facing pressures from polarization, disinformation, and technological disruption. None of these developments can be navigated by slogans alone.

They require precisely what this volume represents: disciplined inquiry.

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Scott Douglas Jacobsen has assembled more than a collection of interviews. He has created an archive of thoughtful voices wrestling with the defining questions of our century. Readers may agree with every conclusion, some conclusions, or very few. That is almost beside the point. What matters is the example these conversations set, an example increasingly rare in public life.

To ask better questions.

To follow evidence wherever it leads.

To remain willing to revise one's conclusions.

And to recognize that the pursuit of truth is not weakened by humility but strengthened by it.

In a culture increasingly satisfied with reaction, A Further Inquiry 2 reminds us that genuine understanding still begins where serious inquiry always has, with the courage to keep asking.

Mathew Giagnorio

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Foreword: Khadija Khan, Editor (A Further Inquiry)

Humanity has been a hostage of the absolute truth in every age. Throughout history, there has always been a temptation among people to assert the final word while negating countless realities that simultaneously exist. Yes, we are doing better than our forefathers in terms of human development, but let's not trivialise the fact that we have an unprecedented flow of information and disinformation that sometimes besmirches our intellectual ability to differentiate between true or false narratives.

We paradoxically seem less confident about the realities around us than we have ever been. Tribalism, political correctness, cultish attitudes, agenda-driven perspectives, misplaced priorities and performative outrage are what define THE truth for most of us. It is hard and sometimes next to impossible to find a piece of writing that not only provides deep insights and epiphanies but also a critical perspective that is sorely needed.

Scott Jacobsen dives deeper and takes on this challenge head-on by offering something far more meaningful and genuine in A Further Inquiry 2 than merely rage-baiting, misplaced outrage, ever-yielding integrity, and performative ideologies.

Jacobsen engages with a rich array of voices, all drawing from diverse cultures, disciplines, and political contexts. You will find experts with the space to articulate their insights in their own terms, an essential confidence that is increasingly sidelined in mainstream media. In this collection, Scott Douglas Jacobsen brilliantly presents a radical antidote to the contemporary malaise, a distinctly humanistic perspective that helps emphasise the inherent dignity, agency, and potential of all human beings using reason and empathy rather than divine or supernatural authority.

Through a series of thoughtful and well-argued interviews, this collection brings together scientists, humanists, activists, and policy thinkers to face off against the defining underlying issues we face as a society. From the ethics of artificial intelligence to geopolitical conflict and public health, everything is being discussed through the prism of intellect, maturity and prudence.

I must humbly remind you of the perils of claiming the monopoly on absolute and truthful information. It doesn't always satiate your cognitive drive. It instead leads one to abandon the pursuit of truth, leaving them stranded on the shores of ever-expanding knowledge. Our human ability to seek truth and be persuaded with substantive arguments deserves better than that.

I reckon that this remarkable collection of interviews and conversations might not lead you to an authentic and absolute perspective on life through rose-tinted glasses; however, it does offer a challenging prospect to get engaged in a battle of ideas and gauge your ability to derive thoughtful insights from complex and thought-provoking words and phrases. The truth is what we seek, so broaden your horizons and embark on this journey of an honest quest for discerning thoughts with this brilliant volume, A Further Inquiry 2, written and well articulated by Scott Jacobsen.

Khadija Khan

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Māori Boy Atheist: Eru Hiko-Tahuri on Integrating Māori Values with Secular Humanism

2025/06/25

Part 1 of 5

Eru Hiko-Tahuri, a Māori creative and author of *Māori Boy Atheist*, explores his journey from religious upbringing to secular humanism. Hiko-Tahuri discusses cultural tensions as a Māori atheist, advocating for respectful integration of Māori values like manaakitanga and whanaungatanga within secular contexts. Hiko-Tahuri reflects on navigating Māori identity as an atheist. He emphasizes integrating Māori values like manaakitanga and whanaungatanga into secular spaces. Through storytelling, funerary practices, and community rituals, Hiko-Tahuri demonstrates that cultural richness and humanist principles can coexist without reliance on supernatural belief.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we're joined by Eru Hiko-Tahuri, a multifaceted Māori creative and intellectual voice based in New Zealand.

Eru Hiko-Tahuri: Thank you for having me.

Jacobsen: He's best known as the author of *Māori Boy Atheist*, where he chronicles his journey from childhood religious observance to secular humanism. Alongside writing, he engages audiences as a radio host, musician, and airbrush artist, integrating cultural expression with personal storytelling. Since launching *Māori Boy Atheist*, with editions available in English, Te Reo Māori, and French, he has contributed meaningfully to rationalist and skeptic communities, offering insights on navigating Māori spirituality as an atheist.

The book was first published in 2015 and has served as a platform to explore the intersection of Māori identity and secularism. His public talks and podcasts, notably *The Heretical Hori*, encourage free thought and integrity within the indigenous context. They combine art, reflective media, and cultural dialogue to foster conversations on belief, identity, and resilience. Through those platforms, I aim to respectfully explore and challenge ideas, especially within Māori communities where belief systems can be deeply personal and culturally intertwined.

Thank you very much for joining me today—I appreciate it.

Hiko-Tahuri: It's a pleasure to be here.

Jacobsen: How do core humanist principles align with traditional Māori concepts such as *mana*, *mana motuhake*, and *whanaungatanga*?

Hiko-Tahuri: *Whanaungatanga* speaks to kinship and the interconnectedness of people. That aligns closely with humanism, emphasizing dignity, respect, and empathy. You treat others as people first—essentially as extended family. It's about looking after the people within your sphere, which reflects humanist ethics well.

Jacobsen: How can secular humanist organizations incorporate *Te Ao Māori*—the Māori worldview—into their activities without endorsing supernaturalism while respecting and integrating those cultural values?

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Hiko-Tahuri: That's a great question. It's not always straightforward, but let me give an example from personal experience. When someone in our family passes away, we take them to the *marae*—a tribal meeting ground—where they lie in state for three days. During that time, relatives come to mourn, share memories, cry, laugh, tell jokes, and say goodbyes.

Depending on travel or family arrangements, the person is buried or cremated on the third day—sometimes longer. This process reflects core Māori values like *manaakitanga* (hospitality, care) and *whanaungatanga*, which coexist naturally with humanist principles of community, respect, and shared humanity. These values shape how we live and commemorate life without invoking supernatural beliefs.

Employers in Aotearoa generally understand that if someone goes to a funeral, they might be gone for three days—that's just the time it takes. All of that work, by the way, is done voluntarily. We gather at the marae. Some families will care for the food, and others will help with arrangements. You can even sleep there.

We sleep beside the body for those three days. We keep them with us. We talk to them. We joke about them. We tell stories. We insult them lovingly. We laugh. We cry. It's all done out in the open, and it's for everyone to witness. That's just the way we do it. It's a good, profound way of grieving together as a collective.

Jacobsen: And within a secular humanist context, this isn't just about superficial inclusion—it's about acknowledging different ways of being. That kind of grieving is profoundly human and deeply cultural. It's not about hierarchy—this isn't about one way being better than another.

Take my Dutch heritage, for example. They're big on windmills, dikes, black licorice, and clogs. The traditional way of burial there is usually more private—placing the body in a mound of Earth and marking it with a cross or a headstone. The grieving tends to happen separately from the deceased.

But for you, it's different. Being with the body, telling stories, laughing and crying beside them—all part of the process. I wouldn't say one way is more valid than the other. These are just different cultural processes for the same human experience. One does not invalidate the other.

Hiko-Tahuri: This is just the way we do it. I don't judge how others handle it, but this is the way I prefer because it's how I grew up. It's what feels real to me.

And yes, there are usually religious aspects involved in the funeral proceedings. When those moments arise, I sit quietly and let them happen around me. I do not participate in those parts because I cannot in good conscience. And that's one of the problematic areas—Indigenous and non-religious. Those are the tensions.

Jacobsen: How do you navigate those tensions?

Hiko-Tahuri: That's the most challenging part, honestly. Knowing when to stay quiet, step back, and speak. It isn't easy.

Jacobsen: Were there aspects where you didn't feel tension at all? Or places where the friction started to show?

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Hiko-Tahuri: Yes. One of the earliest points where tension emerges is during the *pōwhiri*—the welcoming ceremony when people arrive at the marae. That includes a series of formal speeches. It's in that speech-making process where religious content often appears. That's where the rub tends to start.

Jacobsen: Do you find conversations with others in the Māori community become more difficult when you do not endorse the spiritual or supernatural aspects of the culture?

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes. It can be challenging. Not always, but often. Some people are very accepting. Others feel that rejecting the supernatural is rejecting the culture itself, which is not my intention. But the tension is real.

Jacobsen: So you're engaging in the same practices but not endorsing the supernaturalism around them. Is that difficult for people?

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes. Many people do not understand that distinction. There have been many times when I've been told, "You're not Māori if you don't believe in these things." That has happened quite a few times.

Jacobsen: That is unfortunately common. I have encountered similar stories in speaking with Indigenous people—particularly from North America. The closest equivalent, in terms of how it's discussed internationally, is often with African Americans in more conservative or evangelistic religious circles: Baptist, Pentecostal, Methodist—hardline Christianity in Black communities in the United States.

Suppose you're a woman in those communities, and you reject the concept of God or Christianity entirely. In that case, you've forfeited your "Black card." You're suddenly seen as no longer fully part of the community.

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes.

Jacobsen: And that is not just an identity issue—it's social. You're giving up a significant source of communal support in a society that will not necessarily provide support to you proportionately. So, there are deeper sociological and economic implications at play.

I've heard similar things from North American Indigenous people, too—they say, 'You've given up your Indigenous card.

Hiko-Tahuri: Somehow, you're less Māori or less authentic if you're secular. On the *marae* or in the community, that feeling can be present.

Jacobsen: Would you say it is quite that extreme in New Zealand?

Hiko-Tahuri: Probably not to the same extent. New Zealanders are generally pretty liberal. Highly religious people here are sometimes even seen as a bit unusual. We're more secular than many places—certainly more than I've seen in North America. So, it is not as intense, but it can still be challenging.

This is especially true among people in what we might call the Māori Renaissance—those who are just now reconnecting with their heritage. Typically, the first people they learn from are religious, so religion is deeply woven into the cultural learning they receive. Then they meet

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someone like me, who speaks the language and participates fully in the culture but is openly non-religious—and that creates tension for them. It challenges their framework.

Jacobsen: If you look at the traditional Māori worldview—how human beings were made, how the world came into being—what aspects can be reconciled with a humanistic way of looking at things, and what aspects cannot? And maybe you could give us a bit of a background primer. What's the general picture?

Hiko-Tahuri: In the Māori creation narrative, everything begins with *Te Kore*—the void or nothingness. From *Te Kore*came *Ranginui* (Sky Father) and *Papatūānuku* (Earth Mother). They were bound together in a tight embrace, and between them lived their many children—some say seventy, others say fewer.

Because the children were trapped in the darkness between their parents, they decided that their parents had to be separated to live with light and space. This led to a conflict among the children—each had a different view on handling the situation. Eventually, *Tāne Mahuta*, the God of forests and birds, pushed his parents apart, creating the world of light, *Te Ao Mārama*.

These children—*atua*, the closest term to "gods"—became personifications of natural elements. So there's *Tangaroa* for the sea, *Tāwhirimātea* for weather and storms, *Rongo* for cultivated food, and so on. There's debate around what *at*ruly means—whether they're deities or ancestral forces—but they represent aspects of the natural world in human-like form.

These stories explain natural forces through personification. Of course, much of it doesn't align with what we know from science about how humans or the Earth came into being. But some aspects resonate. For instance, each *atua* has a personality—just like humans do. This humanizes nature and gives people a relational framework for understanding their environment.

So yes, while the cosmology isn't scientifically accurate, the relational values and metaphors can still be meaningful. That's where the humanist alignment might be found—not in literal belief but in symbolic or cultural interpretation.

It reminds me of reading Joseph Campbell—how mythologies worldwide echo similar patterns. Eventually, you realize that they can't all be true—and most likely, none of them are. That was my journey. Campbell was instrumental in helping me unpack much of what I had assumed. Once you see that every culture has a creation story—and they often contradict one another—you start questioning which, if any, are "true" in a literal sense.

Jacobsen: I've found it helpful to separate spirituality in the supernatural sense from spirituality as a personal or communal meaning-making practice, especially in conversations like this and other interviews. In other words, spirituality that gives a person purpose or peace doesn't need to invoke the supernatural.

Hiko-Tahuri: Absolutely. That distinction has been vital for me, too.

Jacobsen: When people say "spiritual," I sometimes ask: Do you mean supernaturalism or practices that foster wellbeing or connection? Prayer or meditation, for example, can have measurable health benefits—lowering stress and calming the nervous system—without requiring a belief in the supernatural.

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So yes—looking at spiritual practices in the edification or enriching sense—not in the supernatural sense—what practices are done in the community or individually, or at least encouraged, that might be comparable to things like attending Easter or Christmas mass? Or personal rituals like being told to read a specific scripture in the morning, pray for ten minutes, hold a rosary, and recite ten Hail Marys?

Hiko-Tahuri: I was thinking about practices of personal unification. A lot of our communal activities involve singing. We're a people who love to sing together. You will hear singing at any large gathering—a meeting, a ceremony, or a funeral.

Yes, some of the songs are religious, but what's significant is that you have 300 people singing in harmony. And the richness of sound—those layers of harmonies—is incredible. Whether it's traditional *waiata*, more contemporary songs, or even religious hymns, singing together is powerful. Even if the content has spiritual roots, the experience is about unity, connection, and shared emotion.

Jacobsen: That resonates with me. We're both secular humanists and atheists. I can relate to my time in a university choir. I was in it for about two and a half years, and we sang many classical European music—Bach, Mozart's *Requiem*, and other choral works.

Sometimes, we performed modern songs with a 1950s vibe. I remember people using phrases like "cat" and "daddio" or "you dig," like something out of an Eddie Murphy or Richard Pryor scene. I sang bass, and we once collaborated with musicians from the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra in a 500-seat church. The acoustics were stunning.

It was technically Christian or sacred music—cathedral music, I'd call it—but the overwhelming sense of awe, the physical resonance, the unity of voices… It was a spiritual experience in that broader, secular sense of the word.

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes, I'd call that spiritual too. It taps into a level of connection and emotion you do not find anywhere else.

I do not avoid using "spiritual" in that context. It describes an experience of profound meaning, joy, or connection. I am not using it to refer to supernatural beliefs.

I'm not one of those people who avoids the word altogether. I use it for deeply moving experiences that are transcendent in an emotional sense. Just because a word has a particular religious usage does not mean it is limited to that meaning.

Jacobsen: Yes—most words have secondary meanings. So, use the second meaning! And if someone asks, explain it.

Hiko-Tahuri: Absolutely.

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How Body Language Reflects Emotional Connection in Relationships: Insights from Therapist Thomas Westenholz

2025/06/25

Thomas Westenholz is a couple therapist based in Brighton and Hove, UK, specializing in Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) and Somatic Trauma Therapy. Through his practice at WAVO LTD and the *Couples in Focus* podcast, he helps partners break destructive patterns and rebuild emotional connection using honest, grounded, and research-informed approaches. Westenholz explains how posture, touch, and eye contact reflect emotional connection in romantic relationships. Drawing on Emotionally Focused and Somatic Therapy, he highlights body language as an early warning system, shaped by trauma and culture, and key to rebuilding trust, safety, and attunement between partners.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How do posture, touch, and eye contact reflect the emotional state of a romantic relationship?

Thomas Westenholtz: Posture: I look for signs such as whether their frontal bodies are facing each other and how far apart they are standing or sitting from each other. Are arms crossed or open?

Couples that feel more connected, open, and safe with each other tend to point their bodies towards each other, while disconnected, angry, or resentful couples tend to turn more away.

Arms tend to be open and relaxed, while crossed arms often show defensiveness. This is typically seen in a more avoidant partner protecting themselves from criticism.

Touch is a very significant bonding cue for humans. Couples who feel safe and connected again tend to touch each other far more. Touch (unless there is substantial trauma) tends to soothe and calm the nervous system, making us more receptive to our partner. It also releases bonding hormones such as oxytocin.

A hand touching a hand, a hug, a hand on a shoulder. These are signs of affection and facilitate bonding.

Lack of touch is also common in couples who feel disconnected and either have had some traumatic fracture or where resentment is present.

However, we can’t look at touch in isolation without seeing the context. Touch plays an even more significant role when one partner is in distress, and couples who feel safe and close tend to touch each other more in distress. In contrast, a lack of touch can be a warning sign that they cannot respond and support each other in key moments of distress, leading to loneliness and distress.

Eye contact, similar to touch, also shows the comfort and ease a couple has with each other. Couples who struggle with emotional vulnerability tend to find it hard to have eye contact when speaking about more vulnerable parts. They will look down (shame) or away (avoidance).

Eye contact also releases bonding hormones and is an important cue to regulate each other, as it says, “I am here with you. You are not alone”.

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Jacobsen: What subtle body language cues indicate emotional disconnection between partners?

Westenholtz: Turning away, looking away, withholding touch, rolling eye. “Follow the toes, knees and eyes, and you will see where they want to be”—couplетherapy.earth

Are they looking to move away from discomfort or towards someone?

Jacobsen: How can body language serve as an early warning system?

Westenholtz: As John Gottman’s research showed, when couples reach with contempt, they are far more likely to end in divorce/separation.

Contempt is turning their back on someone, rolling their eyes.

It communicates “you do not matter to me, I do not care for you”

When I notice a lack of touch during distress or a couple’s body language turns away from each other, then it’s a warning system that their safety (the foundation for any long-term relationship) is in trouble.

They are no longer relating (trying to understand each other’s world); they are busy protecting themselves.

Jacobsen: How do cultural norms influence the interpretation of romantic body language?

Westenholtz: While I am not an expert on all world cultures, it does have an impact.

Some of these signs are universal. However, some cultures normalise touch more than others. Even within Europe, imagine British vs Italians.

Some cultures also have different customs around eye contact. Similar to some cultures, touch is not permitted in public.

My responses are very much through a Western lens. However, we do know that before a child is shaped by its culture, they naturally seek eye contact and touch from their caregiver to soothe, and so it’s universal something our nervous system responds to.

Culture primarily impacts what is permitted and our meaning-making (cognitive processing) of what is happening.

Jacobsen: Can couples become more attuned to nonverbal emotional signals?

Westenholtz: The attunement to these signals is hardwired or created very early, when the brain has the highest neuroplasticity.

And so, unlike logic reasoning, we can pick this up and respond with approach/avoid behaviour before we even have language.

Yes, couples can learn to read this, and in my couples therapy, I help couples notice their nonverbal signals, which are body language and tonality.

This means they can be aware of the signals they send that cause their partner more distress and which comfort them. And it’s this map of themselves and their partner that helps them respond in new ways and create a new cycle of connection.

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Jacobsen: What are common misconceptions about body language in romantic relationships?

Westenholtz: I think the most common is simply the lack of awareness of what signals we are sending out with our body language, and that we are often stuck in trying to solve an issue using logic when our bodies communicate far more than our words.

Saying “I love you” while walking away with our back turned to our partner feels very different in their emotional brain (limbic system) than if we are looking into their eyes, holding their hand and saying “I love you”

Jacobsen: How might trauma or attachment history impact the expression or interpretation of romantic body language?

Westenholtz: Excellent question.

Trauma interrupts the processing of signals, as there tends to be either numbing or hyper-vigilance, so the system is alert to danger.

People who have had severe trauma tend to send more defensive cues as they are more self-protective. Escalation tends to happen much faster and more extreme as small signals that a calm nervous system would see as a simply “he is walking away, to get to work on time” can be seen as “he does not care about me” and so that simple turning away can be interpreted in different ways. A more traumatised brain tends to look for the danger cue and would see the second option. This is just an example.

Trauma can strongly impact our interpretation of body language, as what would usually not be a danger cue suddenly becomes one.

They are also more likely to send hostile or defensive body language to protect themselves from imaginary dangers.

Jacobsen: In emotionally focused or somatically based therapy, how is body language used?

Westenholtz: In somatic trauma work, we help the person notice their bodily sensations. What tends to happen in trauma is a disconnect between the bodily sensation, which biologically is one of the three compasses we have to navigate back into balance (logic/cognition, emotion & sensations).

By becoming more aware of their sensation, they can begin to regulate and take actions to get themselves back in a calm place.

An example of how body language could be used is teaching someone bodily boundaries by slowly walking towards them, and they say stop when something in their body feels uncomfortable.

In Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy, we make people aware of how they react in their bodies and notice sensations. Someone could start to fiddle their fingers suddenly, and I might say “x, I noticed you started to fiddle your finger when Y said x, can you help me understand what’s happening for you right now?”

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It brings awareness to their body language and sensations so they can start to navigate the world and their relationship better. Without the three compasses, it's easy to get lost.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Thomas.

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Rotary International Advance Global Health with Low-Cost, High-Impact Solutions

2025/06/26

Part 3 of 3

Pat Merryweather-Arges, Executive Director of Project Patient Care and longtime Rotarian, shares insights from her decades of humanitarian work across over 30 countries. Merryweather-Arges explains that under-resourced hospitals gain quickest impact from three essentials: staff training in evidence-based protocols, reliable WASH (water, sanitation, hygiene), and vaccinations, especially against pneumonia and polio. Clean water alone slashes infection-related deaths ten-fold. She cites Rotary's four-decade polio-eradication campaign—launched in 1985, expanded from a Philippine pilot, now down to ten cases in Pakistan and Afghanistan—as its largest, proving disciplined partnerships, Gates Foundation matching, and field technology can ultimately push diseases to zero.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: When you're doing your assessments, as a professional and expert, how do you determine what's appropriate and most urgently needed in a hospital with limited infrastructure? And more broadly, what do under-resourced hospitals, particularly in rural or low-income areas, most often need to achieve high impact with minimal cost?

Pat Merryweather-Arges: Two things come to mind immediately.

First is training and education. Many births, surgeries, and procedures occur in these settings—often without proper protocols. Just ensuring that staff are trained in best practices can dramatically improve outcomes.

Second is clean water. It sounds basic, but infections are rampant, and clean water is fundamental to preventing complications and maintaining hygiene. Without it, even basic care becomes risky.

The situation becomes extremely dangerous without clean water, and the number of infection-related deaths is significantly higher. I have the data written down somewhere—people die of infections even in the U.S., but the rate is about 10 times higher in countries lacking water and sanitation infrastructure.

I remember visiting a hospital in India—well-intentioned but overwhelmed. In one corner, bloody linens were piled up. They had one delivery room, which consisted of a chair with an opening for childbirth. The exam table where women lie down during delivery had gloves on it.

We were there because they had a very high maternal and infant mortality rate.

I asked the physician about the gloves. He said, *"Well, I clean them after I deliver."* But that is a huge source of infection. Surgical gloves are porous, and you cannot reuse them. So we had to explain to him why single-use gloves are essential and how critical it is to have clean water available.

Truck deliveries can bring water in—it is not impossible. But the combination of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) saves lives. Once babies are born, immunizations are critical as well.

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Depending on the region, of course, polio is a concern, but so is pneumonia, which is a leading cause of death for children under five. Many of them do not receive pneumococcal vaccines, which could prevent that.

So I would say the three most essential things are:

1. Vaccines,
2. WASH (Water, Sanitation, Hygiene), and
3. Proper medical protocols.

You cannot perform surgery and then expect a wound to heal in an unclean environment. Dirt and bacteria will almost certainly lead to complications.

Jacobsen: What is the biggest, longest-running project Rotary International has ever taken on—either solo or in collaboration? Something where the effort spanned years, and ultimately succeeded?

Merryweather-Arges: That would be polio eradication. Rotary took that on as a global mission in 1985. At that time, there were approximately 150,000 children paralyzed every year due to polio.

Rotary ran a pilot program in the Philippines, and it was successful—the country was eventually declared polio-free. From there, Rotary decided to expand the initiative globally. So yes, they have been working on it for over 40 years. That was the beginning of the global push. It has been a long road, but the commitment has never wavered.

This year, there have been only ten wild poliovirus cases worldwide. But it is still a challenge. It has a ripple effect when countries begin cutting back on funding, especially in key areas. For example, USAID provided significant financing for polio vaccines, the workers, and the cold storage necessary to keep the vaccines viable.

That support has been cut, and we are working hard to fill the gap. Other countries have stepped in, but there remains a huge gap that we are still addressing.

The goal is simple: get to zero cases. And we are close, very close.

When I was in India, it was the first time I witnessed the scale of polio's impact on people's lives. People had been paralyzed by polio. I saw them at train stations, trying to earn any money they could. Many were using modified skateboards to move around, pushing themselves along with their hands.

It was heartbreaking—but also deeply motivating. We are at the eradication threshold, and it is not just Rotary leading the charge.

We helped launch the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), which includes the World Health Organization, CDC, UNICEF, and critically, the Gates Foundation.

The Gates Foundation has been a game-changer. They match Rotary donations two to one and have also brought advanced technology. When you are down to just a handful of cases, you need to pinpoint exactly where they are and ensure everyone in the area is immunized.

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The Gates Foundation introduced mobile technology, like iPads, for healthcare workers to use in the field. That technology has vastly improved tracking, reporting, and coordination.

So yes, this is Rotary's long-term project, but it has had far-reaching effects. We have learned so much. We now run health fair campaigns in many parts of Africa and beyond—all because we know that vaccination and fundamental healthcare matter.

Jacobsen: I do not think we are going to top that.

Merryweather-Arges: [laughs] It is something. If the malaria vaccine proves effective, that will be huge—malaria kills so many people each year. Tuberculosis is another one, and they are working on a vaccine for the latest strain.

This work has been challenging, especially early on, because it was uncharted territory. Rotary had never taken on something of this scale before. But now, we are down to just Pakistan and Afghanistan, where the last wild polio cases remain. Thank you so much.

Jacobsen: Thank you. Have a great weekend!

Merryweather-Arges: You too. Bye!

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Mark Carney, North American Trade, and Canada–U.S.–Mexico Relations

2025/06/27

In this wide-ranging interview, **Javier Palomarez** shares his insights on Prime Minister Mark Carney's early leadership, highlighting his pragmatic approach to trade and diplomacy. He emphasizes the importance of Canada–U.S.–Mexico relations under the USMCA, highlighting mutual economic and strategic interests. Palomarez warns of declining trust and trade due to tariffs and political rhetoric, noting boycotts and shifts in public sentiment in Canada. He advocates for restoring confidence and stability through diplomacy and collaboration. With key industries like automotive and energy at stake, Palomarez urges leaders to find common ground and preserve the economic backbone of the Western Hemisphere.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Javier Palomarez, what are your general sentiments regarding Mark Carney's first few weeks in office as Prime Minister, particularly on trade and economic policy? How is this reflected in Mexico's relationship with the United States?

Javier Palomarez: I'm impressed with Prime Minister Carney. He has handled himself admirably.

Both he and President Claudia Sheinbaum have done a commendable job in approaching the Canada–Mexico relationship and recent North American dialogue with pragmatism. They have both been diplomatic and have helped lower tensions while establishing a more respectful and equal footing in discussions.

The U.S.–Canada relationship has historically been strong. For decades, it has remained mostly positive. Economically, this partnership has supported millions of jobs and small businesses across both countries.

According to the latest trade data, Canada is the United States' second-largest trading partner, with more than $750 billion in two-way goods and services traded annually. The trade relationship encompasses key industries, including automotive parts, timber, crude oil, natural gas, and others. It truly covers the whole spectrum.

So, I'm pleased with how the Prime Minister has steered these conversations. I'm hopeful that both nations will continue to engage constructively because we depend on each other. This relationship must remain symbiotic.

Jacobsen: What about the security aspect of the relationship? Is there a broader strategic element at play?

Palomarez: Now, Scott, I'm not a national security expert by any stretch, but it's evident we also share strategic defence interests. For instance, Canada has been in discussions about participating in missile defence upgrades, including potential alignment with aspects of the U.S. Integrated Air and Missile Defense system—though not the Israeli-developed Iron Dome, which is a separate, short-range missile defence system.

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This relationship—between the United States, Canada, and Mexico—has broad economic and geopolitical significance. It is mutually beneficial, and the United States would be unwise to undermine it.

The Canada–U.S.–Mexico triad—under the USMCA, which replaced NAFTA in 2020—is the economic backbone of the Western Hemisphere. Together, we form the largest trading bloc in the region. We are obligated to respect this interdependence and keep building on the strong foundation we already have.

Looking ahead, the USMCA is scheduled for a joint review in 2026, six years after it enters into force. That means we need to begin preparing now—to ensure the agreement strengthens mutual gains, addresses evolving concerns, and gives all three countries a fair say.

I'm thankful that Prime Minister Carney has demonstrated true diplomacy in managing these complex dynamics and helped keep the relationship on course.

Jacobsen: Something you and others have mentioned to me—perhaps not in these exact words—is that stability is good for business. Why is that the case? And what kinds of actions from political leaders can create instability? How has Carney managed to avoid those?

Palomarez: Instability—the inability to plan or invest confidently—is detrimental to businesses on both sides of the border. When markets and regulatory environments are uncertain, companies hesitate. That slows growth.

By avoiding inflammatory rhetoric and resisting political bait, Carney has helped maintain a level-headed approach. He understands that business requires a stable environment to make long-term plans, build partnerships, and commit to capital expenditures. Without that, business 26 confidence drops. And that is not good for anyone—Canadian, American, or Mexican.

Your Prime Minister's willingness and ability to calm the conversation—to avoid taking the bait that's been thrown—and instead think strategically and pragmatically is critically important right now. I'm thankful to both him and President Sheinbaum in Mexico because that's precisely what we need in a trade partner. We need mutual respect and trust. Without that, there will not be a stable environment in which businesses on both sides of the border can plan, invest, grow, and drive our economies forward.

Some trade provisions can be renegotiated during this period—particularly under the USMCA review. The industries that are coming online or have matured in recent years will be key for Canada to consider during negotiations with the United States—and vice versa.

Jacobsen: Which industries, in your view, are most relevant here?

Palomarez: Well, right off the bat, there's the automotive industry. Parts go back and forth multiple times across borders before final assembly and sale. Energy is another critical area for all three partners—especially Canada and the U.S. Pipelines, crude oil, and natural gas—these are foundational sectors for both countries. We must be mindful of this and safeguard those shared interests.

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There's a lot at stake. The relationship has taken a hit. It began with U.S. tariffs on non-USMCA goods and then extended into energy, with a 10% tariff applied. In response, the Prime Minister issued retaliatory tariffs. As of now, we're seeing approximately a 1.5% decline in trade on both sides. There's been a measurable decrease in cross-border tourism—fewer Canadians visiting the U.S. and fewer Americans going to Canada.

We're also seeing signs of a consumer backlash. A poll found that roughly 91% of Canadians expressed a desire to reduce their dependence on American goods. Such sentiments are not conducive to the American business environment. The U.S. needs to understand just how critically important this relationship is. We often take it for granted and fail to reflect on it in a meaningful way.

But the trade you see is just the tip of the iceberg. We share far more than a border—we share people, culture, language, and history. There are also significant national security implications. There is so much built into this relationship.

So, given that long-standing history, calmer heads will prevail. We will normalize relations and return to a place of mutual respect and productive trade.

Jacobsen: As a general rule, I tend to trust that high-income societies function best when mutual trust is intact. When political relationships deteriorate, trust between the societies involved erodes as well. So how can Prime Minister Carney work with President Trump to repair and rebuild trust and, in turn, enhance the potential for income growth for both nations?

Palomarez: Some of the answers here are pretty obvious—mutual respect, returning to the negotiating table, and operating from a shared commitment to restoring trust.

Interestingly, Carney and Trump have more in common than some people might expect. They both understand the importance of financial markets and macroeconomic stability, albeit from different perspectives. If they can focus on mutual interest rather than ideology and rebuild institutional respect across the board, we'll be in a much better place.

They both face the challenge of navigating historic economic pressures—challenges we have not seen in either country in recent memory. Both are under immense pressure from their respective populations to address the failures of prior administrations. They are each working to secure a better future for their nations and, in doing so, for this hemisphere as a whole.

So yes, they have a lot in common if you think about it. Both Prime Minister Carney and President Trump marked decisive political shifts in their respective countries. If they approached the situation from that perspective—recognizing their shared challenges and goals—they could find real common ground. They both face the pressure of proving themselves in contrast to the leaders who preceded them.

In that commonality lies real potential: the chance to work together rather than continue down a path of friction. The United States would benefit from remembering the long and storied partnership with Canada—one that has repeatedly worked to the advantage of both countries. That shared history holds not just the challenge but also the opportunity to restore and strengthen the relationship.

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Jacobsen: Are you aware of the recent changes Prime Minister Carney has made to his cabinet? Do you think those changes might offer insight into how he plans to move forward economically—both in terms of policy direction and resource allocation for government-supported business ventures?

Palomarez: Not in great detail—only from a distance. But again, like Trump in his way, Carney is a man on a mission. They both campaigned on specific mandates and now they're working to deliver on those promises. There's a lot to prove—and not a lot of time to do it.

It's like trying to turn an ocean liner around in a narrow canal. It's slow, it's complicated, and it takes precision. They're both facing that challenge simultaneously.

So, amidst all the upheaval and change in both countries, we're better off respecting each other and identifying points of alignment—ways we can normalize the relationship and work together for the benefit of both nations and their economies.

Jacobsen: Has any sector in business or trade relations, which may have initially seemed damaged during recent tensions, actually turned out to be better off in the long run? Perhaps it was a sunset industry whose decline was accelerated.

Palomarez: Yes. One of the things I've observed—in the cases of Mexico, Canada, and even the European Union—is that long-standing trade relationships can be significantly damaged, if not completely undone, in a matter of weeks. And once that damage is done, it's tough to rebuild the trust.

Trust is fundamental to the U.S.–Canada relationship. And the fear I have is that both the American and Canadian people have long memories. When that trust is broken, it can take years to restore fully. I'm fearful, again, that Canadians have started to boycott American goods. I worry that it may take a while for people to forget—and, more importantly—forgive. So, for me, the sooner we get back to the business of finding common ground and working toward normalization, the better.

My plea to our own President is to actively seek out those points of commonality. We have far more in common than we have in areas where we differ. There is a necessary interdependence and collaboration that has to exist between our countries. If you doubt that, look at a country like Israel and ask what it feels like to have a neighbour across the border who may not have your best interests at heart. It is a stark contrast to what we have enjoyed with Canada—and what I fear we have taken for granted.

A strong economic and trade relationship with a neighbour like Canada is a national asset. It is something we need to preserve, not erode.

Palomarez: Absolutely. Thanks, Scott. Good luck, and I'll be in touch soon.

Jacobsen: Safe travels, Javier.

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AI Threat Detection in Healthcare and Beyond

2025/07/02

Peter Evans is the Chief Executive Officer of Xtract One Technologies, a company specializing in AI-based threat detection and security solutions. He has over 25 years of experience in digital transformation and innovation within high-growth technology sectors. Evans has held CEO roles at four technology companies and has overseen revenue growth, profitability improvements, and multiple liquidity events. Before joining Xtract One, he held senior positions at technology and security firms, including IBM, where he contributed to the strategic direction of the Internet Security Systems division, focusing on security considerations related to cloud computing, telecommunications, and mobile technologies.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What led to the selection of Xtract One's Gateway for deployment at Manitoba's Health Sciences Centre and Crisis Response Centre?

Peter Evans: Manitoba Health conducted a thorough evaluation where they tested multiple security solutions. Xtract One Gateway demonstrated strong performance during its pilot across various hospital locations.

Healthcare environments create unique security challenges. Patients arrive in distress, staff need efficient movement between areas, and the setting must remain welcoming. During the pilot, Gateway showed it could handle these complexities effectively while maintaining appropriate security levels.

We worked collaboratively with HSC staff throughout the process. Their emergency department deals with situations different from those of the Crisis Response Centre, requiring tailored approaches for each location. Our willingness to adapt to their specific needs, combined with Gateway's performance in testing, influenced their final decision.

Jacobsen: How does the system ensure robust threat detection while also maintaining a comfortable and seamless experience for patients, staff, and visitors?

Evans: Xtract One Gateway allows people to walk through naturally without removing items from their pockets or bags. Our AI algorithms distinguish between potential threats and everyday items like laptops, tablets, notebooks, keys, and phones. False alerts are decreased significantly, preventing unnecessary invasiveness and delays for patients.

With Gateway, healthcare staff spend less time managing security processes and more time focusing on patient care. The system prevents entrance bottlenecks, which is important for emergency departments where delays could affect clinical outcomes.

Jacobsen: How does Gateway distinguish between potential weapons and everyday personal items?

Evans: Xtract One Gateway combines advanced sensor technology with AI algorithms to create what we call "threat signatures." The system analyzes object characteristics and then compares them against a library of known threat profiles.

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We've trained our AI on millions of data points representing both threats and common personal belongings. The system continuously improves through machine learning, becoming more accurate over time.

For HSC specifically, we determined sensitivity settings to match and balance their security profile, patient experience, and operational flow.

Jacobsen: What operational improvements are expected in hospitals with this implementation?

Evans: Enhanced safety without operational bottlenecks stands as the primary benefit. Traditional security often creates entry delays that negatively impact patient experience and potentially clinical outcomes.

Xtract One Gateway delivers faster processing while maintaining security coverage. Emergency departments operate more efficiently, staff focus on patient care rather than security procedures, and the atmosphere remains conducive to healing.

Security staffing requirements decrease, as well. Gateway's precision in identifying actual threats allows personnel deployment to more strategic roles instead of conducting manual searches or managing security lines. This is particularly valuable given current healthcare staffing challenges.

Jacobsen: How do Canadian Occupational Safety and Health Agency and the Ontario Nurses' Association statistics make the need for advanced security solutions urgent in healthcare?

Evans: Statistics from the Ontario Nurses' Association reveal that up to **85% of nurses**have experienced workplace violence. Canadian Occupational Safety and Health Agency data confirms healthcare workers face some of the highest violence rates across industries.

These numbers have continued trending upward in recent years. Healthcare workers, dedicated to healing others, increasingly become targets of violence. Manitoba Nurses Union president Darlene Jackson noted that frontline staff felt "much safer" with our detectors in place.

Real people experience trauma in their workplace when these incidents occur. Staff safety affects everything from retention rates to quality of care. Advanced security solutions like Gateway create environments where healthcare professionals can focus primarily on patient care.

Jacobsen: How does Gateway improve screening times and reduce the need for separate bag searches at entry points?

Evans: Xtract One Gateway fundamentally changes the screening paradigm. Traditional security approaches require people to empty pockets, remove items from bags, or undergo separate screening processes for carried items. This creates significant delays, requires additional staffing, and often creates an unwelcoming atmosphere.

Our Gateway system allows individuals to walk through naturally while carrying their belongings. The AI-powered detection can scan both the person and their bags and backpacks simultaneously, identifying potential threats while distinguishing harmless personal items like laptops, tablets, and phones. In most cases, this eliminates the need for separate bag searches.

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In terms of actual numbers, we typically see processing times that are significantly faster than traditional metal detector and bag search combinations. This means that healthcare facility patients can simply walk-right-in, while the hospital maintains effective security coverage.

Jacobsen: What other industries can benefit from AI threat detection systems?

Evans: While healthcare facilities represent an important application of our technology, we're seeing adoption across numerous sectors where safety concerns must be balanced with operational efficiency and visitor experience.

Sports and entertainment venues have been early adopters, and educational institutions from K-12 to universities are increasingly implementing these solutions to protect students and staff. What's interesting is how the technology is being adapted to meet the unique needs of each environment. In corporate settings, it might focus on protecting intellectual property as much as people. In schools, it needs to accommodate high-volume morning entry of students carrying educational technology. The flexibility of AI-based systems like our Gateway means we can customize solutions for virtually any environment where safety and security are priorities.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Peter.

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Xtract One Technologies is a top provider of AI-powered threat detection and security solutions designed to create safe, seamless entry experiences. Its discreet, non-invasive Gateway systems allow facility operators to identify weapons and threats at entry and exit points without slowing foot traffic. Focused on enhancing "Walk-right-In" convenience, Xtract One supports diverse environments, including schools, hospitals, arenas, stadiums, manufacturing sites, and distribution centers. Known for blending advanced security with user-friendly design, the company leads the market in providing safety without compromising experience. Xtract One's cutting-edge solutions reflect its commitment to innovation, efficiency, and protection across high-traffic, high-security venues.

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Emotional Safety, Authenticity, and Body Language in Modern Relationships: A Conversation with Christopher Louis

2025/07/02

Part 4 of 4

Christopher Louis is a Los Angeles–based international dating and relationship coach and founder of Dating Intelligence. As host of the Dating Intelligence Podcast, Louis draws on intuition and lived experience to guide clients toward authentic selves and meaningful romantic connections. Louis talks about the emotional needs of men, double standards in physical boundaries, and how body language communicates trust, safety, and authenticity. Louis highlights the discomfort men can feel when objectified and stresses the importance of consent and respectful space for everyone. He explains how body language—openness, presence, and genuine eye contact—can repair rifts and build emotional security. The dialogue ends with a powerful take on authenticity as aligned selfhood and responsible empathy, with Louis sharing his personal motto: "Meet me today. Be memorable tomorrow."

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Women often talk about how important it is to *feel safe* for authentic emotional expression or romantic connection. What is it, generally speaking, that men need to feel emotionally secure or open?

Christopher Louis: That's a great question. So, I get this from the flip side a lot. I'm a former model, and it's funny—when I talk to women about this, I try to be honest. Off the record, Scott, sometimes I feel treated like a piece of meat.

I'm a pretty emotionally intelligent, intuitive guy, so when women come on too strong or get right in my face, it makes me nervous. It also brings up an absolute double standard that not enough people discuss. What gives someone the right to touch me without my consent? If I flipped the roles—if I touched her arm, or her leg, or her chest without permission—it would be completely unacceptable. And rightly so.

So why is it okay the other way around? Why do some people assume it's fine to come into my personal space—to touch my chest or put their hand on my leg—without even asking? I never gave that kind of permission. I didn't offer validation. I didn't say, "Yes, it's okay for you to touch me." That's a boundary.

Sometimes, as a man, you can experience the same discomfort women feel when their space is violated. It may not happen *as often*, but it still happens. And when it does, it's jarring.

I've had moments where women compliment me—say I'm handsome or "hot" or even joke that they want to "eat me alive"—and while I appreciate the compliment, it honestly makes me anxious. Sometimes, it's the look in their eye. You can tell when someone sees you as an object instead of a person.

It's that same "predatory" stare women talk about experiencing from men—it's real. And I've felt it. In those moments, I've caught myself doing exactly what I described earlier—scanning

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the room, looking for help. I might even turn to my girlfriend and say, "Hey, by the way, this is my partner," just to create space and communicate boundaries.

I stay polite about it. I never want to be rude. But the point is—yes, it happens to men too. And I think sometimes women feel like they have more social license to enter a man's personal space than the reverse.

Jacobsen: Why do you think that is?

Louis: Because it's less common, and the social consequences are different. When a man invades a woman's space—especially physically—it's seen as threatening, and it often is. For example, when a guy walks up behind a woman he does not know, he puts his hand on her lower back. That's a major red flag. That's one of the creepiest things a guy can do.

Say the woman's facing her friends, and this guy slides in behind her and casually touches her lower back before she's even made eye contact with him. Then he circles to the front like it's nothing. That's stranger danger 101. It triggers a safety response—and rightly so. That's something I teach many of my female clients: if a guy ever does that to you, speak up. Tell him, "*Hey, I don't appreciate being touched like that."*Boundaries matter, no matter the gender.

Right—because when someone comes up from *behind* you, that's completely different than approaching from the front. You do not see them coming. And any woman will tell you—being approached from behind, especially with unexpected physical contact, immediately raises red flags. Many women already have a lifetime of experiences where someone gave them creepy vibes. They do not need a stranger touching them from behind and initiating contact that way. It's invasive.

Jacobsen: What does it take to repair emotional rifts—*r-i-f-t-s*—specifically with body language? How can someone rebuild trust through positive physical presence after an argument, a long-term misunderstanding, or a situation where emotions are left unresolved?

Louis: That's a powerful question. Let's use a basic argument as an example—not as extreme as cheating, just a regular emotional disagreement.

When you apologize to someone, your words matter, but your *body language* matters even more. A person can *see* if you're genuinely sorry. If your posture is open, tone is calm, and eyes are sincere, those signals do the heavy lifting. "I'm sorry" is a phrase unless embodied through genuine behaviour.

Once the apology is made and the partner says, "I forgive you," many people mess up: They linger in guilt. They walk around in purgatory, with drooping posture, puppy-dog eyes, and constant speaking in that apologetic tone. That becomes counterproductive.

What I coach people to do instead is this: once the apology is accepted, shift immediately into *reassurance mode*. Use confident, present, and loving body language. You are showing them, "I'm here. I've learned. I've got you."

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Ask, *"How are you today, babe?"* Do something thoughtful. Look them in the eyes when they speak. Touch their hand with presence. Stand tall, not slumped. All of that says more than a thousand words. That kind of body language restores emotional safety and rebuilds trust.

It's not about grovelling or being passive. It's about standing firm and consistent—because that communicates, *"I'm with you. We're okay. I'm not going anywhere."*That's the energy that heals rifts.

Jacobsen: How do you define authenticity?

Louis: Ah—my favourite word. Thank you for that. It's a fantastic wrap-up.

Authenticity means showing up as your *true self* every day, not just when it's convenient, or things are going well. It means aligning your actions with your values, being honest with yourself, and being emotionally present with others.

To me, authenticity starts with self-care and self-love. If you don't love who you are, you'll keep showing up as someone else or hiding behind a mask, and that's not sustainable.

This is who I am. I believe in emotional expression. I believe in integrity. I believe in connection. And I try to bring *that* version of myself into every conversation, every relationship, every room I walk into. This—what you're hearing right now—is who I am. That's authenticity. You show up as your authentic self when you walk into a room with Confidence—not arrogance, but grounded Confidence. That's what I teach in my coaching.

I help women reclaim power and teach men to let go of their egos. I always say, "Confidence is not arrogance. Confidence is strength." Ego, when unhealthy, becomes arrogance.

When a man leads authentically, he is confident without needing to dominate. You can *feel* that energy when someone enters a room. You don't even need to be looking directly at them. People sense it—they turn their heads, they pause. They say, "Who is that?" Not because of how they look but because of the energy they're carrying.

That's what authenticity means to me. When someone is smiling, open, and approachable, their body language is relaxed and genuine. That's how I show up in every space: at a party, at a meeting, or in a one-on-one conversation like this one with you, Scott. What you see is what you get.

Jacobsen: I interviewed Dr. Ramani Durvasula—a noted clinical psychologist, professor, and a massive voice in the conversation around narcissism. She's built a large following by helping people navigate toxic dynamics, set boundaries, and heal.

She made a distinction that struck me. She said that *authenticity is not the same as being unhinged.* Being authentic doesn't give you a license to say or do whatever you want, with no regard for others. There's still a social boundary where your freedom ends and someone else's space begins. There's an unspoken interplay there.

So, when you show up with a positive ego or healthy self-assurance, how do you balance being authentic and showing social responsibility?

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Louis: I love that. And I've heard—or maybe even said—a version of that quote: *Authentic does not mean unchecked.*You can walk into a room, have a bad day, or feel emotionally off—that happens. We all carry internal struggles. But you still need to be present and respectful of others.

I always say: *When you meet someone, you have no idea what their day has been like.*Maybe they're dealing with something heavy. That's why a truly authentic person can still take a moment to be available, to show up for others even if they're having an off day. That's the version of authenticity I live by—and what I teach.

Now, there are different expressions of authenticity. Mine might look very different from someone on the other end of the personality spectrum. I'm more extroverted and emotionally expressive, but someone quieter and more reserved can still be deeply authentic.

The key is that they're not pretending. They're being clear with their energy. Maybe they say, *"Hey, I'm not super outgoing, but I care, and I'm here."* That's authenticity, too—just delivered through a different lens. And I respect that fully. I might not always be in the best or happiest mood—but I will always be honest. I'm going to be emotionally available. And above all, I'm going to be true to who I am.

Jacobsen: What are your favourite quotes?

Louis: Oh my god. So, my favourite quote is one I came up with myself—and honestly, you can put this on the record if you like it. It sums up how I live:

"Meet me today. Be memorable tomorrow."

Jacobsen: That's good.

Louis: Right? Because when people meet me, I want them to walk away thinking, *"Wow, that Christopher Louis was a good guy."* That's what I aim for. So yeah—*Meet me today. Be memorable tomorrow.* That's my personal favourite.

Jacobsen: Christopher, thank you so much for your time today. I appreciate you sharing your insights and your expertise. It's been a pleasure meeting you.

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Minority Within a Minority: Eru Hiko-Tahuri on Being a Māori Atheist

2025/07/02

Part 2 of 5

Eru Hiko-Tahuri, a Māori creative and author of *Māori Boy Atheist*, explores his journey from religious upbringing to secular humanism. Hiko-Tahuri discusses cultural tensions as a Māori atheist, advocating for respectful integration of Māori values like manaakitanga and whanaungatanga within secular contexts. Hiko-Tahuri discusses the complex reality of being both Māori and atheist in New Zealand. He explores cultural tensions, the lack of representation, and the personal journey behind *Māori Boy Atheist*. His story reveals the emotional and social challenges faced by those who reject religion within deeply spiritual Indigenous communities.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Statistically, I do not know of a single government census that includes hate crime data specifically against atheists, agnostics, or humanists. Have you ever seen one?

Eru Hiko-Tahuri: Never heard of it.

Jacobsen: In Canada, the categories usually include antisemitism—perennially at the top—followed by anti-Muslim sentiment or "Islamophobia," then discrimination against Roman Catholics. However, Catholics make up about 30% of the Canadian population, so naturally, they'll be represented in the data due to sheer numbers.

Still, antisemitism usually tops the list. But recent research out of North America shows that people's emotional responses to atheists are often rooted in disgust and distrust—those deep, visceral reactions.

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes, I've read about that.

Jacobsen: And when you break it down by political affiliation—Democrat, Republican, Independent—in the US, the negative perceptions of atheists remain low across all groups. The numbers are roughly as low as those for Muslims, even among Democrats and Independents. It's slightly better in those groups than among Republicans, probably due to the strong influence of the evangelical white base.

But across the board, atheists still rank low in terms of public trust. So clearly, we're missing something in national censuses or surveys. The social stigma is real, but it's under-measured.

Hiko-Tahuri: I'd agree with that. In the New Zealand context, I wouldn't say I've experienced hate for being an atheist. It's more that I'm seen as an outlier—maybe eccentric or just "different"—rather than hated.

Sure, a few people have been upset or uncomfortable with it. But New Zealand is pretty liberal. Most people here don't care what you believe—as long as you treat others well. That's what matters most. We're not as politically polarized, either.

Jacobsen: That's refreshing. Demographically, what's the approximate proportion of people with Māori heritage in New Zealand's population?

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Hiko-Tahuri: They say it's approaching a million people out of a total population of about five million—roughly 20%.

Jacobsen: That's significantly higher than in Canada. Indigenous people comprise around 4 or 5% of the population.

Within your community, have you encountered a dynamic similar to what Mariam Namazie describes among ex-Muslims in Britain? She talks about "minorities within minorities." That is, Muslims are a minority in the UK, but ex-Muslims are a minority within that minority, often facing backlash both from within their communities and from wider society.

Hiko-Tahuri: I understand that idea. You leave a belief system, but you become doubly marginalized. It's not that extreme here, but there are similarities.

Some Māori do view secular Māori as having stepped outside the bounds of what it means to be Māori, especially when religion has become entwined with their cultural reawakening. So yes, you can feel like a minority within a minority sometimes, but it is more subtle here—less hostile, I would say.

Jacobsen: That distinction makes sense. In the UK context, to support ex-Muslims publicly is sometimes misread as being anti-Muslim, which complicates everything. Identity politics can overshadow human rights issues.

Hiko-Tahuri: When cultural identity and religion are closely tied, questioning one can feel like attacking the other—even if that is not the intention.

Jacobsen: And you find yourself in this strange dichotomy—it is just a category error. You *can* support both Indigenous identity and secular values without negating either. It is just a mistake in framing. Do you experience that kind of tension in New Zealand as a Māori person? Or, more specifically, as a Māori atheist?

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes, definitely—as a Māori atheist, I do. I have had conversations with a few others who are both Māori and atheist, and we often feel like a minority within a minority. It is a unique position to be in. Interestingly, though, statistically, about 53% of Māori now report no religious affiliation.

Jacobsen: There you go.

Hiko-Tahuri: Most people would still describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious." Maybe only 10% would openly identify as atheists. So, it is still a tiny group to which I belong.

Jacobsen: Right.

Hiko-Tahuri: That leads back nicely to the idea of "coming out" as both Māori and atheist. I remember that journey. I had been reading all the usual books—*The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins, *God Is Not Great* by Christopher Hitchens, and so on.

I struggled with the language in some of those books because they used words I had never encountered before. As the whole topic was so new, I had to sit with a dictionary beside me while reading.

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Eventually, I reached a point where I realized, “I don’t believe in this anymore.” Then, the more complex question came: “What do I do about it?” And more importantly, “Can I even tell anyone?”

While I was at university, I met a few other Māori who had started to question Christianity, too. By understanding the colonization of Aotearoa, they began to see that Christianity was imposed here—brought in by missionaries from overseas. It was not ours originally. So some of us thought, “Why should we continue believing something that was forced upon us?”

That was my thinking for a while. But then I had another realization: I had rejected Christianity using a rational lens, but I had never applied that same critical lens to traditional Māori beliefs—the *atua*, the creation stories, the pantheon of gods.

So I did. When I examined those beliefs through the same standards, I had to admit—they did not add up either.

That is when I had the next big moment: “I don’t believe this either. So… now what? And how am I going to tell people?”

For a long time, I did not. At first, I equated being an atheist with simply not being Christian—since Christianity is still the dominant religious framework in New Zealand.

But it took years to fully embrace the term atheist in the broader sense—to reach the point where I could say, “I do not believe in any supernatural being that controls the world or defines our purpose.”

Eventually—probably after reading *The God Delusion* for the third time—I thought, “I can’t be the only one.”

Hiko-Tahuri: I remember thinking, “I can’t be the only Māori going through this.” So I started searching for books or articles written by Māori people about being both Māori and atheist. And I found absolutely nothing. There was no one—no one who had written publicly about being Māori and atheist.

Jacobsen: In your experience, had you at least come across others in real life—even if they had not formally written anything?

Hiko-Tahuri: I had met people who had loudly and proudly rejected Christianity and returned to belief in the traditional Māori gods—the *atua*. But I do not think I had ever met another openly Māori atheist—except for one woman I found on YouTube.

Her name was Nairi McCarthy. She was involved with the New Zealand Association of Rationalists and Humanists.

Jacobsen: Oh yes, yes—I know of her.

Hiko-Tahuri: You could have spoken with her a few years ago. Sadly, she passed away five or six years ago now.

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She was the only one I had ever seen publicly acknowledge being Māori and atheist. And I thought, "Damn it. If I'm the only one with some writing skills and talk for a living, maybe I need to write this book."

Jacobsen: Right.

Hiko-Tahuri: That is what led me to write it. I thought, "I know for certain I cannot be the only person who has come to this conclusion."

So I turned to my community for support—and found nothing—no books, no articles. I thought, "Well, maybe I have to be the first. I'll quietly write my story, upload it to the Internet, and maybe someone will find it."

And that is precisely what I did.

Jacobsen: Was it terrifying?

Hiko-Tahuri: Oh yes—completely. I still remember the day I hit *Publish*. I put it on Smashwords. And I had no one to turn to—no reference point for what kind of response it might get.

But what I wanted was to leave a record. I've been to Māori funerals where they lied about the beliefs of the deceased—saying they were believers, that they loved God, when I knew for a fact they didn't.

I didn't want anyone to lie about me to my kids after I was gone. I needed something that told the truth about who I was. So I wrote the book.

It wasn't to convince anyone. It was just *my* story—something people could find and know was real.

Jacobsen: How long did it take to write?

Hiko-Tahuri: About a year and a half. It's a short book, but it took me that long to work through it.

Jacobsen: And the word count?

Hiko-Tahuri: Around sixteen or seventeen thousand words.

Jacobsen: So, roughly a thousand words a month?

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes—about that. I took my time with it.

Jacobsen: That must have been a difficult thing to do. We should get into that part because if someone stumbles across this ten years from now, it could be helpful to them.

What was the tension you felt when you realized, "Oh, shit—I don't believe any of this anymore"?

Hiko-Tahuri: Yeah. I love my community. I love my people. I love our ceremonies. I love the familial nature of it all—the shared values, the collective spirit.

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But I couldn't believe that there were only seventy children of *Rangi* and *Papa* or that everything came from *Te Kore*—the void of nothingness. I couldn't hold that belief anymore.

And that realization… it was jarring. "What do I do now?" It does suck. But I also knew I could not stay silent. I could not pretend I wasn't having these thoughts or deny the conclusions I was reaching.

Jacobsen: That must have been a real internal conflict.

Hiko-Tahuri: It was—a deeply personal one. Part of me thought, "If you just keep quiet, you'll be fine. You don't have to believe—you can go your own way and avoid the conflict."

That was tempting. It would have been easier. But I also knew that if someone asked me directly, I wouldn't lie. I'd say, "No, I don't believe in that."

So, part of the thinking behind the book was: If I write this down, I won't have to explain myself repeatedly. I can point people to it.

That felt honest. It meant I wasn't lying or hiding anymore, either.

Jacobsen: After you published it, was the reaction proportional to the emotional weight you carried? Or was it mostly internal?

Hiko-Tahuri: Oh, it was all internal. The fear, the anxiety—it was mostly in my head.

Jacobsen: How common do you think that experience is? Do you think there's a quiet wave of Māori atheists—or what I sometimes call "atheism-lite," meaning agnostics—people who live by humanist principles but are afraid to come out and say they don't believe in a deity?

People who think they'll face judgment when, in fact, most people are too busy trying not to check Elon Musk or Donald Trump's Twitter feed?

Hiko-Tahuri: [Laughs] Yes, right?

There's a number of us out there. I wouldn't call it a wave just yet, but there are certainly people wondering, "How do I tell my parents I don't believe in God anymore?" That kind of question is very real. It's hard to quantify, of course. But the reaction to the book was primarily positive. People were curious.

One of my cousins—his whole branch of the family is very religious—he reached out to me after reading it and said, "What? I've been thinking like that my whole life. I didn't know that's what it was called—being an atheist."

Jacobsen: That is such a simple statement. But it carries so much emotional baggage for no good reason.

It's fascinating. I've heard everything—from people being jailed or harassed for their beliefs to professional consequences to, on the other end of the spectrum, people gaining fame or recognition for speaking out—like the Daniel Dennetts and Sam Harrises of the world.

Hiko-Tahuri: So, I don't avoid things. I go to gatherings because it's about family first—and that's always been my attitude. Family is family.

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You put family above what individuals believe. That's how my religious family treats me, too—my cousins and uncles. A good example: Seven of my closest cousins were wearing religious robes at a recent funeral, but we still talked and connected. The spiritual stuff was put aside because we're family first.

I'm lucky that way. But it's also a wider New Zealand attitude—family comes before anything else.

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How Body Language Builds Emotional Intimacy in Relationships: Insights from Therapist Patricia Bathurst, LMFT

2025/07/03

Patricia Bathurst is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) working at The Oasis Addiction Treatment Center in California. She provides therapeutic services for individuals dealing with a range of issues including addiction, trauma, anxiety, depression, relationship conflict, dual diagnosis, and LGBTQ+ issues. Her approach integrates evidence-based practices with compassionate support tailored to life transitions, grief, self-esteem, and emotional regulation. She highlights the importance of body language in emotional intimacy, addressing cues of unresolved tension, gender differences, rebuilding trust, and the challenges posed by digital communication.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How does body language contribute to emotional intimacy?

Patricia Bathurst: Body language contributes significantly to emotional intimacy. Soft eye contact, a gentle touch on the arm, or simply leaning in close to someone while listening to them speak can all create a sense of closeness with another human being.

Jacobsen: What are nonverbal cues showing unresolved tension in couples?

Bathurst: The nonverbal cues that are related to unresolved tension include physical distance. A person may cross their arms, avoid eye contact with their partner, or turn away while their partner is speaking.

Sometimes the signs are quite small, though. A person may not realize that they are communicating their tension via their body language.

Jacobsen: How do you help them become aware of their body language with their partner?

Bathurst: I often ask them to pay attention to their body language. Most people don’t really pay much attention to it. Awareness is the first step in making a change.

Jacobsen: What examples of body language reflect trust and emotional safety?

Bathurst: Body language that reflects emotional safety and trust includes leaning in towards somebody during conversation and making eye contact with them. Smiling at them is another big one.

Jacobsen: Are there notable gender differences in body language interpretation in romantic contexts?

Bathurst: Yes, there are sometimes differences between genders when it comes to body language. That’s because men and women are socialized differently. Men tend to have less expressive non-verbal body language compared to women.

Jacobsen: How can couples rebuild emotional connection when body language starts showing detachment?

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Bathurst: First, have an open and honest conversation about the need to build an emotional connection via body language. Then, start small. Focus on things like making eye contact and holding hands.

Jacobsen: What is the role of past relationship experience in shaping a person's romantic body language?

Bathurst: Past experiences can shape body language significantly. A person may be guarded physically if they have experienced betrayal or other negative past experiences.

Jacobsen: How might digital communication affect a couple's ability to respond to body language?

Bathurst: Digital communication removes the majority of body language. Although this is still expressed somewhat through videos, like TikTok and Reels, it still doesn't replace face-to-face contact. It's easy for things to be misinterpreted on social media, even when you can see the person on the screen.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Patricia.

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Global Wars by Decade: From Somalia's 1991 Conflict to the Gaza War (2023)

2025/07/04

What are the major active wars worldwide since 1991 and how have they evolved by decade?

The Nature of War

War is an organized, armed, and often prolonged conflict that is carried on between states, nations, or other parties typified by extreme aggression, social disruption, and usually high mortality… War should be understood as an actual, intentional and widespread armed conflict between political communities, and it is defined as a form of political violence.

LibreTexts (Sociology)

War is nothing but a continuation of politics with the admixture of other means.

Carl von Clausewitz

Narrative Blocs and Media Focus

The Western world—the EU and NATO–focuses on certain narratives relevant to its sphere of concern. From a broader perspective, most of the world's major blocs do so too. There are *a lot*. They fall into reasonably distinct categories, though, and often come in brief acronyms and initialisms.

It can be political-economic unions [1], security alliances [2], additional trade blocs [3], religious traditions [4], or transnational ideologies [5]. Individuals seek others like them. These individuals become people groups. Those groups become blocs with a common philosophy and substantial net vectors for sociopolitical will. The West's primary foci war-wise are Israel-Palestine and Russia-Ukraine now.

However, we can become bogged down in the details. The wider vantage point is more precise about the combat balance and indicates, by contrast, the sheer volume of international news that Western mainstream media *excludes*.

The wars in Ukraine and Gaza are active and the major emphases for Western media. Other contemporary and ongoing wars are the Somali Civil War, Mexican Drug War, Boko Haram Insurgency, Syrian Civil War, Mali War, Central African Republic Civil War, Yemeni Civil War, War in Burkina Faso, Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon, Insurgency in Cabo Delgado, Myanmar Civil War, M23 Rebellion in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sudanese Civil War.

These are *active*. They are listed by the earliest beginning year event–1991–to the most recent. This is the current major state of the world at war. By which is meant, the major wars happening in the world, which are extant. These are presented as a chronology.

Circa 1990s: "Post–Cold War Fragmentation"

The Somali Civil War began in 1991 and continues. It followed the collapse of the Siad Barre regime. The war is between the Federal Government of Somalia, AMISOM/ATMIS

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peacekeepers (ATMIS replaced AMISOM in 2022) and U.S./E.U. forces against Islamists (mostly Al-Shabab). About 500,000 people have been killed in either direct combat or war-related famine and disease. Millions are internally displaced, with the newest waves in 2011 and 2016. Guerrilla warfare is common. Al-Shabab conducted attacks on Mogadishu.

Circa 2000s: “The War on Drugs and New Insurgencies”

The Mexican Drug War began in December 2006 with President Calderón deploying federal troops against cartels. The war is between the Mexican armed forces and federal police with the U.S. Mérida Initiative support against the Sinaloa, Juárez, Gulf, and other cartels. There were more than 60,000 homicides by 2012 and more than 120,000 by 2013, with 115,000 killed between 2007 and 2018. Twenty-seven thousand people are reported missing. There is sporadic internal displacement in cartel strongholds. Violence continues. Homicide rates are among the highest in the world. Cartels are fragmenting, and new groups are emerging.

The Boko Haram Insurgency began in July 2009, primarily in Nigeria-Lake Chad. The Nigerian government and regional militaries are fighting Boko Haram and a splinter ISIS-affiliated ISWAP. Tens of thousands have been killed, with UN/AID estimates at 35,000 killed. There are 2.6 million people displaced across Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. Boko Haram remains active, while Nigerian and regional forces remain active.

Circa 2010s: “Arab Spring, Sahel Unrest & Hybrid Wars”

The Syrian Civil War began in March 2011. It started with anti-Assad protests. Assad government was backed by Iran and Russia, who fought opposition factions of the Free Syrian Army, HTS, Kurdish Forces, and ISIS. More than 580,000 have been killed, up to 613,000 in other estimates, with ~100,000 missing. There are 7.2 million internally displaced people. 16.7 million need humanitarian support. Transitional justice forces have formed.

The Mali War began in January 2012. It began on January 16th, 2012. The Malian government and the French Barkhane (2013-22), UN MINUSMA, and Russian Wagner are fighting against the MNLA Tuareg separatists, AQIM, JNIM, and IS-Sahel. Several ten thousand have been killed, with 428 peacekeeper fatalities since MINUSMA’s inception. There are more than 333,000 internally displaced people and 118,000 refugees, with 5 million displaced regionally in the Sahel.

The Central African Republic Civil War began in December 2012. The war is between the CAR government supported by Rwandan and Russian (Wagner) contingents against the Séléka rebel coalition, Anti-Balaka militias, and CPC rebels. Thousands have been killed. 147 UN peacekeepers have been killed. More than 10,000 children have been recruited as combatants. There are more than 1.1 million internally displaced people. 3.4 million need assistance.

The Russo-Ukrainian War began in February 2014, with the full-scale invasion on February 24th, 2022. The war is between Ukraine, with NATO and EU support primarily, and the Russian Federation, with DPR/LPR proxies. The estimated deaths are 70,935 for Ukraine and 164,885-237,221 for Russia. The total killed/wounded is estimated at 400,000 for Ukraine and 700,000 for Russia. Civilians have been 13,134 killed and 31,867 injured. There are 3.7 million internally displaced people and 6.8 million refugees abroad.

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The Yemeni Civil War started in September 2014. It is between the Houthi-led Supreme Political Council with Saleh loyalists and the Presidential Leadership Council with STC southerners with backing from the Saudi-led coalition. AQAP and ISIL are active. The UN estimates are 230,000 deaths by December 2020, includes indirect deaths. There have been 19,196 civilian casualties by March 2022 and 85,000 child fatalities between 2015-18. There are about 4.8 million internally displaced people and 0.7 million refugees abroad. An uneven truce is somewhat holding circa April 2022. 18.2 million need aid, and the UN-brokered talks have stalled.

The War in Burkina Faso began in August 2015. The war is between the Burkina Faso armed forces plus Juntas/ECOWAS mediator against the AQIM, JNIM, Al-Mourabitoune, and the Ansaroul Islam. There have been more than 20,000 civilians and combatants killed since 2015. There are more than 2 million internally displaced people.

The Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon began on September 9th, 2017. The fighting is between the Cameroonian government and the Ambazonian separatists. There have been 800-1,000 combatant deaths and more than 6,000 civilian deaths by January 2023. There have been 700,000 internally displaced people and more than 63,800 refugees in Nigeria. It is currently at a stalemate.

The Insurgency in Cabo Delgado in Mozambique on October 5th, 2017. The fighting is against the Mozambican government forces, the SADC-Rwanda/South Africa contingents plus Wagner until 2019, DAG, Paramount, and FSG against the Ansar al-Sanna/IS-CAP militants. There have been 4,851 killed, including 2,078 civilians. There are 400,000 internally displaced people.

Circa 2020s: “Post-Pandemic Coups & New Flashpoints”

The Myanmar Civil War began in February 2021. The coup escalated to a nationwide civil war. There is fighting between the military junta (SAC) against the National Unity Government’s PDF and ethnic armed organizations (KIA, AA, TNLA, and others). There have been more than 75,000 total killed (UN), with more than 6,000 civilians killed. More than 3 million people have been displaced, with over 40,000 refugees and 17.6 million needing humanitarian aid.

The M23 Rebellion in the DR Congo began in March 2022. It is a fight between FARDC (plus UN MONUSCO) against M23 rebels allied with Rwanda-backed M23 factions. Hundreds have been killed between 2022 and 2025. War crimes and abuses like rape have been committed, including executions. There are 180,000 displaced from Kibumba and more than a million displaced in North Kivu.

The Sudanese Civil War began on April 15th, 2023, between the Sudanese Armed Forces (Burhan) and the Rapid Support Forces (Hemedti). Estimated dead are thousands, and precise estimates are uncertain. There are 9.1 million internally displaced people, with 1.2 million by the end of 2023. This is the most significant internal displacement globally.

The Gaza War began on October 7th, 2023. It is between the Israel defence Forces against Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. More than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed, with about 1,200 Israelis killed, including soldiers and civilians. About 250 hostages were taken. An estimated 1.4 million have been internally displaced in Gaza.

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This snapshot of major wars and global blocs is necessarily provisional, but highlights narratives, alliances, and conflicts intertwine in the world.

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[1] The African Union, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Arab League, ASEAN, BRICS, G7, G20, Non-Aligned Movement, Commonwealth of Nations, ECOWAS, EAC, COMESA, CEN-SAD, IGAD, Union for the Mediterranean, SADC, AMU, ACP.

[2] Collective Security Treaty Organization, ANZUS, Five Eyes, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, AUKUS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Gulf Cooperation Council, and economic cartels like OPEC

[3] APEC, Mercosur, Pacific Alliance, USMCA, RCEP, CPTPP, CARICOM, Union of South American Nations, CIS, African Continental Free Trade Area, Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, Andean Community, EAEU, EFTA, SAARC, South Asian Free Trade Area, and BIMSTEC.

[4] Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Sunni and Shia Islam, Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.

[5] Communism/Socialism, Confucian cultural sphere, Pan-Africanism, Pan-Arabism.

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Godless but Not Cultureless: Māori Atheism, Identity, and the Quiet Challenge to Norms

2025/07/09

Part 3 of 5

Eru Hiko-Tahuri, a Māori creative and author of *Māori Boy Atheist*, explores his journey from religious upbringing to secular humanism. Hiko-Tahuri discusses cultural tensions as a Māori atheist, advocating for respectful integration of Māori values like manaakitanga and whanaungatanga within secular contexts. Hiko-Tahuri reflects on being Māori and openly atheist in a culture where spiritual belief is assumed. Facing teasing, coded dismissal, and social tension, he challenges the stereotype that atheism is "white," advocating for Indigenous humanism rooted in values, participation, and honest identity.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: In the North American Indigenous context, something that often happens is this: to reject the common beliefs—whether those are traditional spiritual systems or Christian indoctrination brought through colonization—is usually seen as rejecting Indigenous identity itself.

Because of colonization, many Indigenous people in Canada and the US identify as Christian. So, if you're an Indigenous atheist, it's often seen as adopting a "white" belief—or, I guess, more precisely, a white rejection of religion. Atheism is framed as a white thing.

Eru Hiko-Tahuri: Yes, I've come across that sentiment here, too. I've had family members say similar things when I tell them I'm going to speak at an atheist group or do an interview like this. They'll say something like, "Oh yes, that's you, and your funny white friend," or "That's your weird white thing."

Jacobsen: [Laughs] So there's a little dig, but it's not hostile?

Hiko-Tahuri: It's more of a friendly poke than a grave insult. There's no real malice behind it. It's like a teasing jab, not a deep cut.

Jacobsen: And at least they're not using racial slurs like you'd sometimes hear in North America —words like "cracker"thrown around with some edge to them.

Hiko-Tahuri: Right, it's gentler here—more of a soft ribbing than anything else.

Jacobsen: I've heard similar things from North American Indigenous people. Atheism is often perceived as white, so any Indigenous person who identifies that way is viewed as having abandoned their roots—when really, they're just thinking independently.

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes. That's the dynamic. But honestly, I don't care what other people think. I do me. I don't have the energy to worry about other people's opinions of me. If something comes up —and it rarely does—I'll deal with it then. But in the meantime, I live my life.

Hiko-Tahuri: I won't worry about what the rest of the Māori community thinks about me. I was even on Māori Television, here in Aotearoa, talking openly about being an atheist.

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One of the more common comments I received afterwards was, "Oh, he needs to learn more about his culture."

Jacobsen: This is a sophisticated way of saying, "He's ignorant of our ways—therefore, he doesn't accept our ways." It's a coded dismissal.

Hiko-Tahuri: Ironically, I practice more of our customs, speak more Te Reo, and participate more fully in the culture than many people making those comments.

Jacobsen: So, would you say that reaction is patronizing within the Māori community?

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes. That's precisely what it is.

Another interesting thing is how certain people are automatically respected in the Māori community based on appearance. For example, if you're an older Māori man wearing a clerical collar—any religious collar, regardless of denomination—you're automatically afforded the status of someone to be respected.

Jacobsen: For clarity, could that collar belong to a Christian denomination or another tradition?

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes, it doesn't matter what religion it is. If you wear the collar, you get that reverence. And I've met some of those men—they're not particularly insightful or wise. I wouldn't trust them to lead anything other than a church service. But because they hold that religious role, they're treated with deference. So they're seen as *kaumātua*—elders—because of the position, not because of actual wisdom or age.

You can be a 30-year-old wearing a collar and be treated like an elder. That's one of my frustrations with how religion plays out in some Māori spaces.

Jacobsen: Would you distinguish here—again, using international terminology but applying it to a Māori-specific context—between indigeneity as culture and indigeneity as religion?

Because what I've come across in other interviews is a concept some call "Indigenous humanism." It's a framework where people continue participating in Indigenous practices—storytelling, ritual, community events—but without the supernatural belief component.

But on the flip side, I've also seen some Indigenous frameworks begin to mirror structured religions: hierarchy, sacred texts, holy oral traditions, and supernatural entities—almost resembling traditional Abrahamic models with "gods," sacred teachings, powers, principalities, and so on.

Some Indigenous atheists and humanists I've spoken with are worried about this trend—a kind of religious revival forming around indigeneity itself. Their concern is that it could become dogmatic and undermine secular and Enlightenment-based thinking.

Hiko-Tahuri: I get what you're saying. I haven't seen that happening here, at least not in a widespread or formalized way. But part of that could be numbers. You'd need a critical mass of people adopting that framework for it to take shape.

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It's less about isolated belief and more about institutionalization. It doesn't evolve into that kind of system if you don't have the numbers, but I understand the concern. Once belief systems become formalized, there's always the risk that they become exclusionary or dogmatic.

We do not have that many of us, so we have not even had the chance to break ourselves into different "types" of atheists. We have not even come together for a group chat to discuss our thoughts. So no, I have not seen anything like that fragmentation yet because we are such a tiny group in New Zealand.

There has not been enough critical mass within atheism to split into more specific beliefs or approaches.

Jacobsen: If your initial feeling after publishing the book was one of relief—and the reaction was much more subdued than anticipated—do you now see people entering the atheist or humanist space, especially Māori, with this almost irrational sense of fear, only to realize, "Oh… it's fine. It's not a big deal"?

Hiko-Tahuri: Honestly? No, we do not even really see that reaction. Because so few people talk about it publicly. When we gather, we have roles to fill. We are there to work—we have responsibilities. There is no time to sit and have long philosophical debates about belief.

Jacobsen: That sounds like a cultural distinction. Take something like the Catholic Church—they gather, sit, listen, and sing. It is contemplative. But you are describing something very different.

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes. For example, there is much to do if we're at the marae. We have protocols, hospitality, food to prepare, cleaning, hosting—so much practical work. We do not pause to reflect or debate belief systems during those moments.

At most, you might hear someone say, "Oh yeah, that cousin over there's a bit different—he doesn't believe in God." And that's it. That's probably as deep as it goes.

Jacobsen: So the culture itself, in those moments, emphasizes function and participation over theology.

Hiko-Tahuri: We are caught up in the activity of the occasion, not in philosophical contemplation about the universe's origins.

Jacobsen: So—what was the general reaction to the book? Good, bad, ugly, neutral, controlling?

Hiko-Tahuri: [Laughs] Honestly? Most people I knew contacted me to say, "Why am I not in it?"

Most reactions were driven by self-interest—"little me" stuff. Many people who read the book were curious if they were in it. A lot of the feedback was, "Oh yeah, that's just you being you." I've always been considered a bit weird anyway.

Jacobsen: [Laughs] Familiar.

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Hiko-Tahuri: Other than that, people would say things like, "I never thought about that," or "I didn't know you *couldn't believe* in God." Because belief is so deeply embedded in Māori identity from such a young age.

Jacobsen: Is it similar to beliefs around *wairua*—the spiritual essence or spirit?

Hiko-Tahuri: Very much so. *Wairua*—the spiritual dimension—permeates everything. It's so ingrained that when someone steps outside of it or says, "I don't believe in that," it's beyond what many people are prepared to consider. They ignore it. It's too far outside the norm to process.

Jacobsen: Did the book catalyze others—within the community or the broader New Zealand public—to come forward or speak out?

Hiko-Tahuri: I don't know. I don't want to claim that other Māori atheists came out because of my book. I can't say that for sure. But we have a Facebook group called *Atua Kore*, which means "godless." It has about 500 members now.

Jacobsen: That's a solid number.

Hiko-Tahuri: It is. And yes, we've had a few people post in that group announcing that they're atheists—that they'd made the decision, and it was huge for them. That happened after the book came out, but I won't say it was *because* of it. I don't know.

Jacobsen: Are there any prominent atheist or humanist figures in New Zealand generally—Māori or otherwise?

Hiko-Tahuri: No real high-profile names come to mind. One of the cultural dynamics in New Zealand is what we call "tall poppy syndrome"—we tend to cut down the people who stick out. So, self-promotion is frowned upon here. You don't boast; you don't elevate yourself. You keep your head down.

Jacobsen: Honestly, North America could use a little more of that.

Hiko-Tahuri: [Laughs] Maybe! But because of that, unless you're already *in* the community, you've probably never heard of any of our local atheists or humanists.

Jacobsen: Are there any other books, aside from yours, by Māori atheists?

Hiko-Tahuri: Not yet.

Jacobsen: That's wild. Okay, let me put this on the record: open offer. If we can gather around 100,000 words' worth of conversations with Māori atheists, agnostics, or humanists—fully inclusive—I'll help compile it. You can tell me your life story, "coming out," and reflections. No pressure.

Hiko-Tahuri: That sounds good.

Jacobsen: It's an ironic "coming-to-Jesus" phrase. [Laughs] But really, the point would be to *normalize* it. To show that being a Māori atheist isn't a big deal—it's just one way of being. That #NormalizeAtheism message. You've got 500 members in the *Whakapono Kore* group. Surely, some would be up for it.

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Hiko-Tahuri: Maybe. But I don't know how many would want to go public. That's always the challenge. Out of those 500 members in the *Atua Kore* group, I know about four people willing to speak publicly.

Jacobsen: So basically, the secretary, vice president, president, and treasurer?

Hiko-Tahuri: [Laughs] Pretty much—except we're not that organized. It's not even my group; someone else started it. I'm just a member like everyone else.

Jacobsen: What is the Taranaki Maunga?

Hiko-Tahuri: Oh yes, I am granting personhood to the mountain. That's an environmental protection mechanism more than a spiritual or belief-based one. It's a legal framework designed to safeguard the mountain.

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The Case of Dr. Christopher DiCarlo: ‘We Are All African’ and the Clash of Science, Culture, and Academia

2025/07/09

On November 1, 2005, Dr. Christopher DiCarlo taught a sessional course at Southern Ontario university on critical thinking, an area of expertise for him. A sessional (freelance) faculty member is part of the academic precariat.

He freelanced for six to seven years between three universities in Ontario. He won a teaching award at the University of Guelph. On the board, he wrote a distinct scientific fact, succinct and scientifically grounded: “We are all African.” The singular form shows all humans share a single ancestral origin. Using the Genographic Project DNA kit on his son Matt, they traced their lineage through Italy to ancestral roots in Africa.

He wrote this to illustrate human beings’ shared genetic legacy and broader ancestry. The purpose was pedagogical to spark critical discussion among 93 students. The pedagogical decision was grounded in research. Research DiCarlo had done at Harvard and Spencer Wells’ Genographic Project.

There was immediate pushback from a student. They asked, “Yeah, but how do you know that?” It is a good moment to educate people on human ancestry from scientific facts. An Indigenous student questioned, “But my people would not accept that… Who is right–their creation stories or the scientific evidence?”

He pitched a cross-cultural dialogue, inviting Indigenous elders and scientific colleagues to engage in respectful debate—a proposal that received applause and was warmly welcomed by the class. Although Indigenous elders were invited, none ultimately joined the class, and no further dialogue took place.

On November 11, 2005, Dr. DiCarlo got a letter. A letter stating two Christian fundamentalist students and one Indigenous student collaborated–all women. The three alleged that by using the phrase, DiCarlo was promoting racism and Eurocentrism. The letter was from the Associate Dean of Southern Ontario University.

In mid-November 2005, the university retracted the tenure-track critical thinking position. It was a new position. DiCarlo was shortlisted for the position, which ended his candidacy. No public explanation for the position retraction was provided. Pre-retraction, he met with the university Vice President to review the job description of the new tenure-track job.

In late 2005, Dr. DiCarlo filed a grievance to the faculty union. The grievance produced internal emails showing the university’s violation of the collective agreement. They failed to shortlist and interview him, as required. The absence of this protocol breached the collective agreement.

In early December 2005, the university negotiated a confidential settlement with Dr. DiCarlo–no arbitration. A nominal financial settlement was given under a non-disclosure agreement, which barred public defence or admission of wrongdoing. On January 16, 2007, he gave a lecture entitled “We Are All African: Our Greatest Discovery,” at York University’s Calumet College.

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In September 2008, he received the UOIT Complementary Faculty Teaching Award and TVO's Big Ideas Best Lecturer in Ontario Award. Dr. DiCarlo considers this episode an early instance of cancel culture in academia. After the incident, he created the "We Are All African" T-shirt and wore it to a conference. Reactions differed. An African-American attendee supported it.

He wrote an article in *Free Inquiry* entitled "We Are All African! Can scientific proof of our commonality save us?" The purpose was to show a case *against* privileging any origin mythology over another. He went on a cross-Canadian speaker circuit with the "We Are All African" message.

He was a Visiting Research Scholar at Harvard's Department of Anthropology and Peabody Museum. He did research. Two notable papers were produced: *The Comparative Brain: The Evolution of Human Reasoning* and *The Evolution of Religion: Why Many Need to Believe in Deities, Demons, and the Unseen*.

Now, Dr. DiCarlo is the Principal and Founder of Critical Thinking Solutions, Ethics Chair for the Canadian Mental Health Association, and Expert Advisor for the Centre for Inquiry Canada. He is also focused on AI, a Senior Researcher and Ethicist at Convergence Analysis, and a lifetime member of Humanist Canada.

He observed a trend. Other university philosophy departments ceased offering critical thinking courses. He considers himself one of the first "canceled casualties" in Canadian academia. Dr. DiCarlo's case showcases academic inquiry and pedagogy can become vulnerable to ideological conflict. A conflict bound to institutional structures, even if the position is grounded in evidence and inclusivity.

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The Rise, Crisis, and Continuity of Nathan J. Robinson's Current Affairs Magazine

2025/07/09

Nathan Robinson's articles, and Current Affairs generally, have been consistently challenging and thought-provoking, with incisive critique and informative discussion, lucid and provocative, and focused on well-chosen issues of major significance. I find myself regularly recommending Robinson's articles to others, and re-reading them myself. Unusually valuable contributions.

Prof. Noam Chomsky

Current Affairs is one of few superb places to go to get moral and spiritual depth combined with crucial progressive analysis and vision in a decadent American culture! The rich legacies of Martin Luther King, Jr., Noam Chomsky and Barbara Ehrenreich are alive in this marvelous magazine.

Dr. Cornel West

Nathan J. Robinson and Current Affairs are consistently excellent, writing at a very high standard, and offering serious and compelling alternative perspectives. Very worth following and reading.

Glenn Greenwald

Yes, Nathan is a brazen hypocrite who would be leading the righteous denunciation if this happened to anyone else. The schadenfreude is merited. But the left has created a deranged, self-immolating culture where nobody can survive… Over and over, left-wing spaces destroy themselves. They're impotent, can't achieve anything, so turn on each other to feel strong and meaningful. But they can only raise their fist over cheap, performative theater. The puritanical rules they've imposed ensure self-destruction... Nathan is reaping what he sowed, just like Scott Stringer, Dianne Morales and so many others. The Frankenstein they unleash to sadistically destroy others eventually comes to eat them. Nathan is a mewling, obsequious socialist, but in this sick leftist prism, he's Jeff Bezos.

Glenn Greenwald

We are sad, aghast, betrayed, and of course, angry to realize that this person we trusted has been lying to us for years. We, a small staff composed entirely of women and non-binary people, have faithfully worked to make Current Affairs the beautiful, engaging leftist magazine and podcast that it is.

Current Affairs **Open Letter**

Dr. Nathan Robinson earned a J.D. from Yale Law School. He completed his Ph.D. in Sociology and Social Policy at Harvard University in May 2022. He is a libertarian socialist. He advocates for workers' rights, democratic workplaces, and anti-capitalist principles. He writes on a wide range of socialist subjects.

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He founded the publication *Current Affairs* in 2015 with Oren Nimni. The original 2015 Kickstarter campaign raised $16,607, surpassing its $10,000 goal. Nimni serves as Legal Editor. Currently, it is based out of New Orleans, Louisiana. It is published as a bimonthly left-wing magazine with thousands of subscribers. It carries no advertising. It is funded by subscriptions and donations.

For about 6 years, things were good, until alleged firings and a worker co-op dispute happened. It involved Dr. Robinson, Allegra Silcox (Business Manager), Lyta Gold (Managing and Amusements Editor), Kate Christian Gauthreaux (Administrative Assistant), Aisling McCrea (Former Podcast Producer), and Cate Root (Poet at Large).

Staff alleged the triggering event was a Zoom meeting on August 7, 2021. There were discussions for a "more democratic workplace" for more than a year on a continuous basis. Robinson perceived the *proposed* changes as disregarding his vision for *Current Affairs.*

On August 8, 2021, staff were locked out of Slack. They received emails. The emails requested resignations. Alternatively, he offered "honorary titles." The titles came with no governance power. Staff perceived this as *de facto*terminations. No prior notice was given.

No performance improvement plans were provided. Standard practice gives a two-week performance improvement period. However, it is *not* legally required in all employment contexts, especially for at-will employees in the U.S. Staff claimed being fired for attempts to restructure *Current Affairs* to a worker-owned cooperative reducing the unilateral control of Dr. Robinson.

The former staff members published a public letter in August, 2021, linked by Lyta Gold. Their central allegation hinged on single statement. "We were fired by the editor-in-chief of a socialist magazine for trying to start a worker co-op."

The letter highlighted the perceived hypocrisy of Dr. Robinson by staff members based on public socialist advocacy, i.e., holding disproportionate power, lack of responsiveness, and prolonged absenteeism. Several portions are indicative:

Yes, we were fired by the editor-in-chief of a socialist magazine for trying to start a worker co-op… Nathan became agitated… behaved in a hostile manner… started removing people from the company Slack… sent letters requesting resignations, eliminating positions… offering new 'honorary titles' which would have no say in governance… he admitted that he simply did not want Current Affairs to be a democratic workplace… he wrote: 'I think I should be on top of the org chart, with everyone else selected by me and reporting to me'… We note darkly that he says 'egalitarian community of friends,' and not, of course, a workplace… he has effectively fired us for organizing for better work conditions… we are sad, aghast, betrayed… Nathan J. Robinson can write articles and give speeches, but… he simply isn't up to the task… We have no better explanation for Nathan's behavior than any of you, but it is clear to us now that this is simply the most extreme event in a pattern of controlling and dishonest actions that began long before this sequence of events and has created an untenable situation for the workers… this feels like a light going out.

Dr. Robinson's responses changed over time. The initial response, he claims to have "irreparably lost faith" in his staff's ability to collaborate effectively. Within the first 24 hours, Robinson

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changed the position, while retracting the original response. Now, he still supported a democratic workplace, but went against a co-op structure. He considered *Current Affairs* "purely" his project and not a collectively governed entity, but an "egalitarian community of friends."

He acknowledged personal leadership and shortcomings in this. At the same time, he maintained general support for labour organizing elsewhere. He did not address the hypocrisy allegations directly. Dr. Robinson took three actions. He:

1. requested resignation of three staffers.
2. reassigned an employee's title.
3. offered a contractor a different role.

On August 19, 2021, the board of directors issued a public statement. No staff had been 'officially' fired, while severance discussions were ongoing. Subsequently, *Current Affairs* was announced as on hiatus on Twitter (now X) by Vanessa A. Bee.

Uncertainty for the future of the magazine surrounded this hiatus. Dr. Robinson began reconciliatory efforts. He offered reinstatement of staff positions. Earlier, in February 2021, *The Guardian* discontinued Robinson's U.S. opinion column. The discontinuation followed a satirical tweet about U.S. military aid to Israel.

He struggled with severance negotiations and the maintenance of the organizational community. On August 13, Dr. Robinson proposed $234,352 (USD) in severance. Staff remained on the payroll through September, 2021; bylaws prevented formal terminations. Five departing staffers received severances totaling $76,014. This was about 34% of the magazine's cash reserves. They remained on payroll through September 2021 per board bylaws.

Yasmin Nair alludes to departing staff spreading falsehoods; further, those leading to online harassment of Robinson and financial harm to the magazine. Direct causal connection and financial specifics remain unconfirmed. Structural and vision disagreements were the dispute, not ideological betrayal.

The staff's push for a co-op structure aligned with progressive values and Dr. Robinson's stipulated values. The tension between individual centralized authority and collective governance showed in the story. Since 2023, no major developments on this particular narrative. He co-authored *The Myth of American Idealism* with Prof. Noam Chomsky in 2024. Currently, *Current Affairs* is operational and Dr. Robinson retains status as Editor-in-Chief.

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Take It Slow, Allan’s Parkinson’s Disease

2025/07/10

I remember a dad once, Allan.

It was home, town.

He used to always show up at the events in town.

There were a whole series of events around and with him.

But never too directly, one time, he set me up for a date with his kid, gave me twenty Canadian bucks: “Everyone needs to get laid.”

Wow! Cool dads are often the most inappropriate dads.

They — the child of his — were good-looking.

I even smoked a cigarette, after the date, to impress this kid of his,

who was older than me.

Man: *So* hip, *so* cool, so… cough, cough-cough.

Intermittently, I found out from others.

He had bipolar disorder.

Later, he was estranged from his kids.

Still later, he was suffering from Parkinson’s Disease.

I hadn’t seen him in years.

Years, and years, later, I was working at a local restaurant as a dishwasher. I remember talking with one of the staffers who mentioned old Allan.

“Allan,” *that* Allan? My.

He had moved to the island, they said.

His disease had progressed, they said.

He died, a couple years prior, they said.

Allan was dead. No goodbyes.

He trained as a Jesuit priest, had a crisis of faith or something, developed more explicit bipolar, became a counselling psychologist, and died from the eventualities of Parkinson’s Disease, likely, estranged, for sure.

No goodbye for Allan was dead.

“Everyone needs to get laid.”

Well, everyone is laid to rest,

Allan, a dad, once.

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Mark Carney vs. Donald Trump: Energy Policy, Climate Finance

2025/07/11

Yale-trained energy economist **Ed Hirs** contrasts the leadership and philosophies of Mark Carney and Donald Trump in this in-depth interview with Scott Douglas Jacobsen. Hirs highlights Carney's global credibility and his commitment to sustainable finance, in stark contrast to Trump's transactional, fossil-fuel-driven approach. Hirs critiques the myth of U.S. energy independence, explains the economic flaws in "Drill, Baby, Drill," and underscores the long-term viability of renewables. He outlines how market forces, climate data, and energy transition are reshaping global policy—regardless of political shifts. Hirs warns of urgent climate tipping points, echoing voices like Hawking, Keeling, and Nordhaus.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Ed Hirs. He's a Yale-educated energy economist, an inaugural energy fellow and lecturer at the University of Houston. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in energy economics and is widely recognized for offering clear, apolitical analysis on complex energy issues. He is frequently quoted in both national and international media.

Hirs has authored numerous opinion pieces and academic publications on energy markets, energy policy, and corporate governance. He also co-founded and co-chairs the Yale Alumni in Energy conference, an annual event focused on demystifying energy policy and promoting transparent, fact-based discussion free of political spin. He is considered a trusted voice in public discourse on energy finance, the Texas electricity grid, and global energy security.

How would you characterize the ideological and economic policy contrast between Mark Carney and Donald Trump?

Ed Hirs: Well, there's a difference in style and philosophy, perhaps more than in explicit economic policy. Mark Carney is essentially everything that Donald Trump is not. Carney earned degrees from Harvard and Oxford, where he completed a doctorate in economics. He worked for over a decade at Goldman Sachs, served as Governor of the Bank of Canada from 2008 to 2013, and then as Governor of the Bank of England from 2013 to 2020 — making him the only person to head the central banks of two G7 countries. He guided the Bank of England through Brexit and was a key figure during the global financial recovery. He has advised governments and multilateral institutions and currently serves as the UN Special Envoy on Climate Action and Finance.

Carney is a highly competent, globally respected expert in monetary policy, financial markets, and climate finance. He understands that no single individual can dictate the direction of markets. Markets operate on expectations, seek profit, and tend to converge toward equilibrium by closing arbitrage gaps.

President Trump, by contrast, comes from the private real estate sector. He has a contentious and legally complex business history, including multiple bankruptcies. According to public records, several of his casino and hotel ventures failed — most notably, four Atlantic City casinos filed

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for bankruptcy under his leadership. Trump tends to view large institutions, including banks and central authorities, more transactionally and often antagonistically.

So the contrast in style, substance, and global credibility is clear. I would bet on Carney in a poker game against President Trump any day.

Jacobsen: What do you think of Carney's advocacy for sustainable investing and his influence on shaping Canada's international economic policy? How does that contrast with what you might call "Drill, Baby, Drill 2.0"?

Hirs: Carney's advocacy for sustainable investing is rooted in rigorous economic reasoning and climate risk management. As a central banker and now as the UN Special Envoy, he's championed the idea that climate risk is financial risk. He helped launch the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), aimed at making companies disclose how climate change impacts their business.

His work supports aligning financial systems with net-zero goals, which stands in direct contrast to extractive-first policies like "Drill, Baby, Drill 2.0," which prioritize short-term fossil fuel development over long-term sustainability. While the Trump administration rolled back environmental regulations and withdrew from the Paris Agreement, Carney's approach has been about integrating climate policy into mainstream economic planning and financial regulation.

Even with resistance in places like the United States, the overall trajectory of sustainable investing is forward. Eliminating or defunding climate data collection agencies does not stop global warming or market adaptation. Investing in sustainable energy production is central to future global economic growth, particularly as the Global South develops. Over the next 40 to 50 years, an estimated 2 to 3 billion more people will join the global population — and energy access will be critical to improving their quality of life without worsening the climate crisis.

The development of the Cosmos field offshore Ghana — and the incredible wealth it has generated throughout West African nations — has extended the lifespans of people across the continent. These populations are going to want, and are already moving toward, energy-intensive technologies. They are not going to get Ford F-150s, but they all want iPhones. They all want the Internet. They want safe and reliable food resources.

And so, no matter what the U.S. or Canada does, we are going to have to adapt to what happens across the rest of the world. The Trump administration holds the view that it is not necessary to accommodate either U.S. behavior or global behavior — or to account for the consequences that come from that stance.

Carney, on the other hand, has a different view — one that many developed nations, the EU, and China share: we need to plan ahead. We are seeing more and more weather disasters arise and intensify due to a warming atmosphere. A warmer atmosphere holds more moisture, and when that moisture is released, it causes increasingly devastating effects.

The melting of the polar ice caps is another major concern. Where I grew up, along the U.S. Gulf Coast, the water level is now 16 inches higher on average than it was when I was a child.

Jacobsen: Can you address "Drill, Baby, Drill" as well?

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Hirs: Certainly. “Drill, Baby, Drill” is not going to work. The U.S. is currently producing roughly 13 million barrels of oil per day, of which about 2 million barrels per day are light ends — natural gas liquids (NGLs) that sometimes get classified as crude oil.

Texas, for example, has been producing around 4 million barrels a day, mainly from the Permian Basin in West Texas. This oil is light. The U.S. is more than self-sufficient in light grades of crude oil. However, the U.S. refinery system depends on both light oil and heavier grades — including, at times, up to 4 million barrels a day imported from Canada.

So, the U.S. is not energy independent, and it is inaccurate to describe the U.S. as energy independent.

And, in fact, in the tariff war, if Canada decided to stop exporting crude oil to the United States and stop selling electricity down to the United States, the U.S. would be in a heck of a fix. The Midcontinent region would have to find and source refined products from somewhere else. There are not enough power plants in the Northeast or through the Midcontinent Independent System Operator — MISO — for the U.S. to operate independently of Canada.

So, the “Drill, Baby, Drill” issue also relates to the cost of oil. Tight formations require higher prices. The Dallas branch of the Federal Reserve — the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas — published its Energy Survey for the fourth quarter of 2024, and 85% of the respondents said they would not invest or drill new wells at a price below $70 per barrel. That forecast includes the year ahead.

Now, with tariffs on steel 25% higher, the cost of drilling these wells has gone up. The price of oil is somewhere around $60 per barrel at this moment. So, we are going to see the rig count in the United States drop like a rock.

And because these tight formation wells tend to produce nearly 80% of their lifetime output in the first two years, we are going to see a steep decline in U.S. oil production through the end of the year. The “Drill, Baby, Drill” mantra simply will not work at $60 oil or less.

The opening of lands in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico and along the Eastern Seaboard — lands that President Trump had actually removed from drilling and exploration during Trump 1.0 — will not add anything meaningful to U.S. production. It takes too long for companies to evaluate, explore, drill test wells, and then bring them to market — up to 15 years.

Opening up ANWR — the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — and other Alaskan lands to drilling is not going to help either. That oil needs to sell at $100 per barrel just to make it worth the cost of moving men and material up to Alaska to begin exploration again.

What Trump has asked for from the Saudis is clear — he’s asked for low oil prices, and he’s getting them. During Trump 1.0, the average price of oil was lower than it was during the Obama administration, and lower than it has been during the Biden administration — even setting aside the pandemic-related price suppression.

Trump — more than 30 years ago — was taking out advertorials in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, calling for low oil prices. Essentially, he argued that high oil prices are a tax on living. That idea has been one of his touchstones throughout both his private and public

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careers. And the Saudis? They are willing to go along with it. They have about 2 million barrels a day of excess production capacity — or production in reserve.

Increasing production at this time is helpful for OPEC+ to punish those member nations that have been cheating on their quotas. So, the low oil price helps Trump. Of course, we saw from his trip to the Middle East that there is a lot of reciprocal investment coming back into the United States from those OPEC members who have made a lot of money over the years. It is a real issue.

In fact, back in 2010, we wrote a paper titled *Crude Oil and National Security*, where we discussed the rationale for returning to President Eisenhower's oil import quota system. That system was originally intended to keep the United States relatively oil independent. It was eliminated by Eisenhower's former Vice President — who by that time was President Richard Nixon — when he struck a deal with OPEC and Saudi Arabia to maintain low oil prices in exchange for an expanded U.S. defense umbrella. That, of course, led to the United States becoming extremely dependent on foreign crude, triggering the Arab oil embargo and everything that followed.

So, this is not just an economic issue — it is truly a national security issue. At the moment, the only way the United States can project naval power and maintain air superiority is with hydrocarbons. You should ask about that.

Jacobsen: YSo, there are those who champion decarbonization efforts — such as Carney and his allies — and others who do not, such as Trump and some of his allies. Will this create tension in energy policy and in foreign relations — binational or multinational?

Hirs: It should not. Keep in mind that during Trump 1.0, a great deal of progress was actually made toward decarbonization of U.S. energy supplies. This was led primarily by the states and state-level initiatives. Also, the extremely low price of natural gas — relative to both oil and coal — pushed coal-fired power plants out of the power stack across America and reduced the use of liquid petroleum products.

So, natural gas has become the bridge fuel, the substitute fuel. In Texas, for example, we are seeing extreme growth in both wind and solar energy — although the legislature is about to pass a bill to try to slow that down. But Texas — the home and oil capital of the world — currently has the largest utility-scale solar fleet and the largest utility-scale wind fleet in the country. Soon, it will have the largest battery storage fleet as well.

This is a substitution of electrification for hydrocarbon fuels. And as economists, we know that the low marginal cost producer wins out in the end. Because there is no fuel cost for wind or solar, those technologies will undercut natural gas, oil, and coal over time. That is where we are heading.

It is called the transition for a reason. It is not going to be smooth. Everything that is happening in Washington — and in Texas, for example — is making sure that it is not smooth.

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Jacobsen: And there is, quite frankly, a lot of science fiction that has gone into energy commentary over the decades. Figures like Isaac Asimov and others — humanist figures — were big on this.

Carl Sagan and Isaac Asimov — both humanist figures and major public science educators. One was more of a writer than a practicing scientist, but regardless, some of their legacies are being carried forward today by the American scientific community — by people like Neil deGrasse Tyson, Bill Nye, and others.

So, we still have these public figures who speak about science, energy, and the future. One big topic that has always come up in that commentary, especially in the science fiction context, is the Kardashev scale.

And so, in that larger picture, solar is pretty much the endgame — in terms of any advanced civilization's energy source. The question, then, is: will this transition happen before climate change renders life unsustainably livable? I know Chomsky had a different phrasing for it.

Hirs: And that was one of Stephen Hawking's final warnings — that humankind would eventually fry itself, through the generation of electricity and the misuse of AI. He may yet be right about that.

At our recent conference at Yale — just two months ago — we had Bill Nordhaus, one of my former professors and a Nobel laureate in climate economics, as well as my classmate and dorm mate Ralph Keeling — the scientist behind the Keeling Curve for CO_2 levels in the atmosphere. They had never met before. Yet they referenced each other's work in their presentations. A physics major like Ralph had no reason to visit the econ department back in the day, so we finally brought them together. That was pretty cool after almost 50 years.

Now, going back to the Kardashev scale, at the time we were estimated to be around a Type 0.7 civilization — which is kind of cute. But the reality is more urgent. We know that we have now surpassed the 1.5°C global warming threshold.

Ralph Keeling's projections show that if we do not begin actively reducing CO_2 in the atmosphere within the next five years, and if we do not act dramatically, we will not be able to avoid breaching the 2°C warming limit.

Jacobsen: I remember when President George H. W. Bush dismissed concerns about the ozone hole, which was caused by fluorocarbons.

Hirs: Yes — fluorocarbons. Apparently, what led him to change his mind was personal experience. While at his usual summer retreat — the Walker Point Compound in Kennebunkport, Maine — he got a blistering sunburn on his head because the ozone hole had extended over the bay. He got cooked.

Jacobsen: Is that kind of personal impact still relevant today?

Hirs: Yes, absolutely.

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Jacobsen: So, when I talk to businesspeople and economists — especially those outside environmental fields — they often speak about stability as if it were a guiding principle, even if they do not state it directly. So, it is probably fair to say: markets and business love stability.

Do you think Trump will eventually provide some stability for the energy sector, particularly in supporting a more sustainable future? Or no?

Hirs: I do not see it coming in this term. Certainly, in his first term, Trump was actively pushing for low oil prices. But of course, when oil prices are low, the economic incentive to shift to alternatives — like wind and solar — diminishes. So, in that sense, he was undercutting the transition to more sustainable energy sources.

Eventually, I expect to see the shift occur — with or without Trump. I view the current situation as a temporary slowdown. There is a 1.3-gigawatt solar farm about to be commissioned north of Dallas. It covers 18,000 acres. That 1.3 gigawatts of capacity will be supported by just 12 full-time employees — six of whom are shepherds who manage the land and livestock grazing beneath the panels.

By comparison, a 1.3-gigawatt nuclear power plant would require around 500 or more employees. A coal-fired power plant would need slightly fewer than that, but it also faces serious materials handling issues — coal coming in, ash going out, and water remediation processes.

Natural gas power plants, particularly the newer models, are essentially jet engines. They require maybe 100 to 200 employees per gigawatt unit. So when you look at the operating costs of these different power plants, along with fuel costs, the economics clearly favor wind and solar — especially as battery storage technology improves and the cost of battery installations continues to drop. 1.3 gigawatts is enough to power close to a million American homes.

It's a huge amount of energy. Of course, in Texas, it might not quite power a million homes — because, well, we run the air conditioner too damn much.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Ed.

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Secular Māori Voices and Global Indigenous Rights: Eru Hiko-Tahuri on Inclusion, Identity, and Reform

2025/07/16

Part 4 of 5

Eru Hiko-Tahuri, a Māori creative and author of *Māori Boy Atheist*, explores his journey from religious upbringing to secular humanism. Hiko-Tahuri discusses cultural tensions as a Māori atheist, advocating for respectful integration of Māori values like manaakitanga and whanaungatanga within secular contexts. Hiko-Tahuri critiques the invisibility of secular Māori voices in leadership and policy. While spiritual leaders dominate Indigenous representation, Hiko-Tahuri calls for inclusive frameworks honoring non-religious Māori. Drawing from international instruments and personal advocacy, he urges reform in mental health care, cultural practices, and national recognition of secular Indigenous identities.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: The international community has increasingly formalized support for Indigenous peoples through declarations, conventions, and covenants. Some of the most notable include:

- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted in 2007.
- International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (1989).
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) includes Indigenous peoples under legal definitions of racial protection.

These instruments serve as essential frameworks for recognizing Indigenous communities' cultural, environmental, political, and spiritual rights.

Additional international instruments support Indigenous rights, which are not often discussed but are incredibly important.

- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) — Article 1 affirms the right to self-determination for all peoples, including Indigenous communities.
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (also 1966) contains articles addressing equality, cultural rights, and the right to participate in social and economic development, which directly apply to Indigenous peoples.
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) — Article 30 affirms the right of Indigenous children to enjoy their culture, religion, and language.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) — General Recommendation 39 specifically addresses Indigenous women and girls.

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- The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities (1992) — Affirms collective minority rights, including Indigenous identities.

And there are several region-specific instruments:

- The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter, 1981) — Article 22 recognizes the right to development, including for Indigenous peoples.
- The American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (ADRIP, 2016) — Establishes principles for self-identification, cultural preservation, and public participation.
- UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) — Recognizes and protects the cultural expressions of Indigenous communities.
- The Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), Article 8(j), mandates respecting and preserving Indigenous knowledge, innovations, and practices related to conservation and sustainable biodiversity.

So, this is not "nothing." There's a body of international law supporting Indigenous rights. Of course, the tension always lies between what is declared and what is implemented. That's where the evidence and accountability need to come in. From your perspective—within the Māori context—do you see any of these declarations, covenants, or charters shaping Māori–New Zealand relations?

Eru Hiko-Tahuri: To be completely honest, I've only ever heard of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). That's the only one that ever comes up in public conversation or news here. All the others? I haven't heard of them.

Jacobsen: That's insightful. If we take secular humanism as a life stance grounded in an *empirical moral philosophy* that adapts its ethics based on new evidence, do you think Māori secular humanists could lead in implementing or advocating for some of these international declarations?

Hiko-Tahuri: I would like to say yes—but I worry. Like I said before, in our Māori communities, the people who wear collars—the religious leaders—get the leadership roles. People like me, who don't wear a collar, are less likely to be listened to.

So, Indigenous secular humanists—are not currently in a position of influence when it comes to policy or leadership. And that's something I think about a lot.

Jacobsen: That's a critical and complex conversation. It reminds me of my last in-depth interview with David Cook, Maheengun, who has an Anishinaabe background in Canada. He identified as a traditional knowledge keeper—but importantly, *was* a knowledge keeper. There's nuance in how Indigenous knowledge and leadership structures function and interact with humanist and secular frameworks. In the North American Indigenous context, the term for that is that you do not have a *collar*, but you might be a *pipe carrier*.

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Maheengun gave up his status as a pipe carrier because, for him, there was too much dissonance between his humanist, atheist worldview and the expectations that came with that ceremonial role.

That gets into something I do not think anyone's explored yet: if someone adopts atheism and secular humanism seriously and then steps away from a role like a pipe carrier or traditional knowledge keeper, how does that affect their voice—not just within the community but in broader systems like government-to-government or what is often termed "nation-to-nation" relations in Canada?

Because if someone lacks ceremonial or spiritual status, they often have no formal recognition—and no seat at the table. So, the representatives federal governments see in these discussions tend to be those with supernatural frameworks. That becomes the perceived Indigenous worldview, even though, as we know, many Indigenous people do not subscribe to that at all.

And the same is true for Māori. Significant portions of the population—like in the 634 recognized First Nations bands in Canada—either reject or question those beliefs. Even if, as in your case, they still participate culturally. Yet they are still not always seen as "real Māori" by some.

Where could that conversation go? What questions should we be asking?

Hiko-Tahuri: I've been thinking about this one for a long time—and honestly, I still don't know.

In New Zealand, the government recognizes several iwi—tribal groups—as official representatives. So, if the government wants to consult with Māori, it will go to those groups and their hierarchies. The structure is established and formalized.

But here's the thing: because those bodies represent the majority, people like me—those without a spiritual or ceremonial role—do not get much say.

That said, I've been fortunate. I have working relationships with some of the local tribal leaders. I've worked within their organizations, so I know at least they're getting one different voice in the room—mine. I can say, "Hey, this is something you must consider."

But that's not a system-wide thing. It's very personal. And yes, it isn't easy to imagine how to scale that and how to make it more inclusive.

These representatives often claim to speak for all of us. But do they? We don't know.

Jacobsen: That's a tension in democratic governance, too. No political party or leader truly represents *everyone*. They represent the most significant percentage of voters in a particular cycle. So even there, you get a majority-of-plurality scenario, not true consensus.

It's the same dynamic. When a Māori elder with a collar and status comes forward and tells the New Zealand government, "This is what we want as a community," it's assumed that their voice *is* the voice of all Māori.

But that's not the case.

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Hiko-Tahuri: There's a presumption that doesn't map cleanly onto European governance models. But most of our iwi—tribal groups—that the government interacts with *are* democratically elected. It's not always a traditional hereditary hierarchy. Leaders are often voted in.

Jacobsen: Interesting. So there's a mix of democratic process and cultural leadership?

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes, and I wouldn't say all of those leaders are particularly religious either. Many use religious language or rituals to connect with the people they serve. It's less about being deeply spiritual and more about resonating with the majority—many of whom are.

Jacobsen: That ties into self-stereotyping and external stereotyping. It becomes a kind of feel-good activism—what I sometimes call "parade activism" instead of "hard-work activism."

For example, I attended a session at the 69th Commission on the Status of Women—Canada's Indigenous. There was an Indigenous panel, and a few participants represented Indigenous communities beyond Canada's borders.

Some arrived in full traditional dress—massive ceremonial headgear and all. Now, that visual shorthand becomes what government officials expect to see. It creates a kind of caricature—but it also becomes self-reinforcing.

That person becomes the "abstract ideal" of what a proper Indigenous representative should look like, and the government becomes the "abstract system" responding to that image. Both sides feel good about the exchange, but it risks becoming performative. It's not always representative of the range of Indigenous experiences—especially secular ones.

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes,.

Jacobsen: So it becomes this cycle: "*We* brought the *right* Māori to the table," and "*I*represented the *right* version of Māori identity." Everyone walks away satisfied—but it also acts as a brake. You're pushing the gas and the brake at the same time.

Hiko-Tahuri: Right—and then when someone like me comes forward, without the collar or ceremonial role, they're seen as the outlier.

Jacobsen: Like the cranky guy on the porch yelling at the sky.

Hiko-Tahuri: The Garfield of the meeting, if you will. [Laughs]

Jacobsen: No one *wants* that person. They're not the story anyone wants to hear.

Hiko-Tahuri: That reminds me of something recent. The New Zealand Psychological Society referenced my book.

Until now, the society's approach was based on a framework developed by a respected Māori elder—someone known in cultural and philosophical spaces. He proposed a four-sided model of well-beingwellbeing, likened to a house. It's used widely in Māori mental health services.

The four sides are physical, family, spiritual, and—something else. But the point is: if you're working with Māori clients, the model says you *must* consider all four, including the spiritual.

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So, twenty years ago, I went to see a therapist. They used this exact model. We sat down, and they said, "We need to begin with a karakia—a prayer."

I said, "I'm not religious. I don't want to pray."

But their training told them they *had* to do it. So, I was forced to sit through a religious ritual I didn't believe in to access mental health care. And worse, I was pressured to *participate* in that prayer myself. That's a significant example. It shows how models meant to be inclusive can become exclusionary—especially for Māori who are secular.

Jacobsen: That's like people being forced to go to AA.

Hiko-Tahuri: I presented to a group of psychologists about a year ago. One of the prominent members—someone involved in the humanist movement here—submitted a formal statement to the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists.

He said, "Look, this is a perspective you haven't considered." That spiritual requirement—where practitioners were required to begin with a prayer—was challenged. As a result, recommendations have now been made to adjust those protocols to include people who do not believe. That's one positive change I can point to that came out of it.

Jacobsen: Is the traditional Māori dance called the *haka*?

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes, the *haka*.

Jacobsen: That seems like one of the more benign aspects of cultural tradition, even for someone transitioning ideologically. I don't see how a dance would be impacted by whether someone is spiritual.

Hiko-Tahuri: No—not at all. The *haka* isn't inherently religious. It's a form of emotional and communal expression. While its origins include warrior preparation, it's evolved far beyond that.

There are *haka* for celebrations, mourning, farewells, and graduations. At university ceremonies, if someone Māori walks across the stage, people from their whānau will often leap up from the crowd and perform a *haka* in celebration. It's done everywhere, for all kinds of moments. It's how we express collective feelings—joy, grief, pride, and love.

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Healing Generational Trauma Through Family Constellation Therapy: A Conversation with Blanka Molnar

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Blanka Molnar is a Houston-based holistic therapist and certified family constellation® practitioner. As the founder of Awarenest and a conscious parenting coach, Molnar explores multigenerational trauma, emotional regulation, and the challenges of parent-child relationships across cultures. Drawing from personal experience and professional expertise, she discusses how inherited trauma can shape behaviour, why boundaries are vital, and how family constellation® therapy helps uncover and heal generational wounds. Molnar emphasizes the importance of individual responsibility, self-awareness, and culturally sensitive approaches in fostering inner healing, especially for families navigating complex emotional dynamics.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So today, we're here with Blanka Molnar. She's a Houston-based therapist, certified family constellation® practitioner, and the founder of Awarenest. As a conscious parenting coach, she specializes in helping families heal multigenerational trauma and support neurodivergent children through systemic constellation® work, meditation, and practical tools. Her work empowers parents to foster emotional intelligence, intentional parenting, and inner healing, with a focus on ADHD, emotional regulation, and spirited children.

Blanka offers transformative coaching that combines mindfulness with developmental and somatic insights. An immigrant mother and small business owner, she advocates for gentle, conscious parenting and supports multicultural families in navigating complex emotional dynamics with compassion and clarity. Thank you for joining me today. So, what are some of the common reasons a once-close parent-child bond becomes strained in adulthood?

Blanka Molnar: Good question. Each of us must forge our path. Sometimes, that journey requires distance from our family—whether physical or emotional—to find our voice and identity truly.

As I often say, I love stories and fairy tales where the hero must leave home, face their dragons, and walk alone through the unknown. This metaphor holds meaning in both my personal and professional life.

I left my home country, Hungary, and was the first in my family to graduate with a degree in economics. But after working in the corporate world, I decided to leave that behind. I moved to the United States to work as an au pair, caring for children and, in many ways, starting over. It was part of a larger journey—to heal not only personal wounds but also inherited trauma.

These weren't just family patterns. I grew up in Hungary, which, although never officially part of the USSR, was a satellite state of the Soviet Union under communist rule until the late 1980s. I was five years old when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989—a pivotal moment in the collapse of Eastern Bloc communism. The legacy of that era included scarcity, generational pain, and a deep cultural imprint of survival and silence.

I believed that walking my path independently, even if it meant being alone for a time, would help me heal. And it did. I spent years doing deep personal work—what I call "peeling the

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onion," layer by layer, filter by filter—until I could rediscover who I truly was underneath inherited stories.

I never entirely cut ties with my family, but I did put an ocean between us. That distance—the Pacific, in this case—gave me the space I needed. The nine-hour time difference made regular communication less frequent, which allowed me to focus inward and process deeply.

Now, when I visit or we talk, I'm coming from a more grounded and authentic place. I'm not speaking from anger or old pain. I've processed much of that. Through the practice of family constellation®, I've been able to see my family from a new perspective and gain a deeper understanding of their struggles. This work has helped me offer compassion—not only to clients but also to my parents.

I've cried, I've laughed, I've processed years of pain and joy. And today, I feel more whole. My parents still know how to push my buttons—many of us experience that—but the triggers are fewer. I no longer react the way I once did. That's the gift of doing the inner work.

Jacobsen: So this is, long story short, that you sometimes need much healing—even if you believe your childhood was amazing and your parents stayed together. You still have to find your inner strength. When your parents are either too perfect or far from ideal, it cannot be easy to develop that strength in their presence. Sometimes, you have to step away—to abandon them, in a sense—so you can eventually return to the relationship from a more authentic and grounded part of yourself. What about unresolved childhood dynamics and their impact on the multigenerational child-parent relationship? That's the concept of multigenerational trauma.

Molnar: Yes, this is a more nontraditional way of understanding human development, and it comes from my experience with family constellation® therapy.

Sometimes, when a child's behaviour or attitude suddenly changes—especially over a short period—it may signal that an unresolved trauma or emotional wound has been activated. This trauma may not even originate from their own life. It can be something inherited from generations past—what we call transgenerational or multigenerational trauma.

For example, you might inherit trauma from your great-grandmother—something she experienced that was never spoken about or processed. That trauma can remain dormant for decades, only to be triggered when you reach a certain age or life milestone. Let's say you turn 35, and something traumatic happened to an ancestor at the same age. Or you're trying to start a family and struggling with fertility, and that activates emotional patterns passed down through seven generations. Family constellation® work can trace these patterns back up to seven generations.

It can also show up in everyday experiences—such as starting a new job and suddenly feeling like your buttons are being pushed in unexpected ways. Beneath that reaction, there may be a deeper, inherited wound at play. The challenge is that we rarely have detailed knowledge about what happened five or seven generations ago. If we're lucky, we may know a bit about our great-grandparents—but rarely beyond that.

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That's where healing through holistic approaches, such as family constellation® work, becomes powerful. It gets to the root. And when parents begin to heal those hidden wounds, their children often begin to heal too—because the emotional legacy is no longer being unconsciously passed on.

Jacobsen: When a parent feels hurt, rejected, or confused because their adult child has withdrawn, how can the parent respond without criticism or defensiveness?

Molnar: That's a tough one. I'm a parent myself, and I've also done that to my parents. So I'm right in the middle—I know both sides. It's not easy.

In an ideal world surrounded by self-aware and emotionally conscious parents, we would not take it personally. But real life is more complicated. Still, I believe this: we're all here to bring our lessons, and sometimes we need distance to teach them.

If it resonates with you, consider that we bring experiences or karmic patterns from past lives. Even if you don't believe in past lives, you can see that each person comes into this life with specific lessons to learn. So, when a child withdraws, it is often not about the parent at all. It is about the child finding their way and resolving their inner journey.

The best response a parent can give is patience, presence, and a willingness to stay open—without assuming blame or trying to fix it. That allows for reconnection to occur in a more genuine and healing manner.

Yes, maybe how the parents raised the child contributed to the dynamic—but it is not entirely their fault. As parents, we often try to fix our children or take responsibility for them. Sometimes, the reverse happens—children end up taking responsibility for their parents.

But what we have to recognize, especially when we're talking about adult children, is that each person must take responsibility for themselves. You cannot fix your child. You cannot live their life for them.

So, in an ideal situation—where you can step back—you recognize that this is not about you. It is about them. You can say, "Hey, I love you unconditionally for who you are, even when you make mistakes. But I will take a step back. If you fall, I will be here to catch you. But I respect your choices, your decisions, and your life."

That is the greatest gift you can offer them. And it is also one of the most painful because it is so much easier to try to fix someone or fix a situation than to step back and say, "You know what? I trust your strength. I trust that you can handle this."

Jacobsen: What about communication strategies—something positive, affirming, assertive—to allow for honest dialogue, without offence, about how a child may be feeling and how a parent may be feeling in those situations?

Molnar: As a parent, you can express yourself honestly. You can say, "Yes, this hurts me. Your choices right now are painful for me." You can acknowledge that. Say, "I'm your parent. I raised you. We went through so much together."

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But again, if your child pulling away doesn't trigger something unresolved in you—like an abandonment wound or a loss of identity, especially in single-parent homes—it is easier to communicate from a grounded, centred place.

This does not mean suppressing your feelings. It means not adding emotional intensity that clouds understanding. You can say, "Yes, this hurts, but I want to understand you." One thing I often suggest to my clients is saying, "I need time."

You do not need to respond, ideally in the moment. You can say, "I need to process this. I may need to meditate on it. I may need to journal. Right now, I'm in pain, and I don't want to speak or act from this place of pain. But give me a few days, and let's come back to this conversation."

Pausing and asking for time is one of the healthiest communication tools—especially when emotions are high.

Jacobsen: And what about children setting boundaries? It doesn't necessarily have to be across the Pacific Ocean.

Molnar: [Laughing] Yes, funny enough, I learned that it does not always work. You can put a whole ocean between you, and your emotional baggage will still come with you.

In my case, I recreated the same emotional dynamics across the ocean—. The same issues came up. I tried to escape them, but it didn't work. That's when I realized that healing must come from within.

So, yes—setting boundaries with parents can be difficult, especially depending on their and the children's personalities . But it is necessary. Boundaries are not about cutting people off; they are about creating the space you need to grow. It's about respecting yourselves and others. And eventually, that can strengthen the relationship.

That's why I see so many clients who say, "No, I've completely cut my parents out of my life—and I don't want to go back." And if that's how you feel right now, I understand. But I don't typically recommend that to my clients. Whether we're conscious of it or not, we receive energetic support, strength, and psychological grounding from our parents—even when the relationship is strained or complicated.

When you completely shut them out of your life, it can feel like trying to fly a jet without its engines. If you cut off your mother, it's like flying with one engine down. If you cut off your father, the other one is gone. You're trying to spread your wings and soar but without foundational support.

So, instead of full disconnection, I encourage people to seek support—through therapy, holistic healing, journaling, or any modality that resonates. But also suggest to, ask yourself your *why*. That *why* will carry you through difficult moments. Why do you want to create distance? Why do you feel the need to fly to the other side of the world? Why are you putting emotional space between you and your parents? What are you trying to heal?

And you can communicate that. You can say, "I love you—or I'm not sure how I feel right now—but I need healing. This isn't about you. This is something I need to do for myself."

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That is a more constructive way to express your boundaries. It avoids blame or finger-pointing. You're not saying, "Because of you, I'm like this," or, "You're responsible for how I grew up." Instead, you're stepping into adult responsibility and saying, "This is my decision. Right now, I need space. That might mean I do not call you for a while. It might mean I move to Asia, rent a little scooter, and go on a personal journey to rediscover my voice."

You can always return to the message: "This is about me. This is for my healing, my peace of mind, my future."

Jacobsen: What are some everyday situations that North Americans face in their family dynamics—especially points of tension? And does that differ from what you experienced growing up in Hungary?

Molnar: Yes and no. When I was born, Hungary was experiencing financial instability. And my family, like many others, was also struggling financially. So there was a sense of limitation—not just economically, but emotionally and culturally. What Americans had access to in the 1970s and 1980s—choices, variety, mobility—we didn't.

You had different brands of soda and different types of jeans. We had one pair of jeans. When my father was finally allowed to travel to Austria and brought back gummy bears or other sweets, it was a huge event. That was expensive. It was rare. And it was tied to a sense of scarcity.

So yes, the values we grew up with were different—shaped by restriction and survival. We were raised with a mindset of limitation. But what I see in the U.S. now—especially among younger generations—is a different kind of challenge.

It's not a matter of scarcity but a generational reckoning. Many young people feel that something in the previous generations did not work, and they are determined to change it. There's a collective sense of, *"This ends with us."* That's something I see echoed across cultures now—Hungarian, American, and elsewhere. The language is different, but the need to break cycles and create something healthier is universal.

You can even see it reflected in popular media—new movies, new series—with titles like *It Ends with Us*. There's a growing awareness that generational cycles of pain—especially abuse, narcissistic dynamics, and unhealthy parenting patterns—must stop.

A few pain points I see repeatedly include narcissistic personalities, entitlement, and overprotection. There's a helicopter-style parenting approach where children are highly protected and provided for, which on the surface seems loving—and it is—but it can have unintended consequences. Children may struggle to find their voice to develop independence and resilience, especially when they've never had to navigate life without constant parental oversight.

So yes, there are overlapping issues globally—trauma, control, disconnection—but the specifics can differ based on the country's economic and cultural context.

Jacobsen: Typically, do cultural dynamics place more strain on family relationships than individual personalities and interactions? For example, someone growing up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo might experience the influence of poverty more directly than someone in

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the United States. But in both cases, could the individual parent-child relationship still be the primary factor in emotional strain, regardless of the broader context?

Molnar: Again, I'd say both. Culture and individual dynamics are deeply intertwined.

From my experience growing up in Hungary and now living and working in the United States, I've seen how culture influences parenting. The U.S. is an individualistic country. That's a vast cultural difference. It shows up in how we raise children. In times of crisis—like hurricanes or other disasters—Americans come together. But day-to-day life? It's very much finding *your way, being self-sufficient, and standing out.*

Parents here often feel pressure to push their children to excel very early. Kids are enrolled in piano and swimming lessons at the age of two. By age four, they're expected to be preparing for their SATs! [Laughing] It is intense. Such a culture fosters high expectations and competitiveness.

By contrast, many Asian cultures, for example, are more community-oriented and place stronger emphasis on respect for elders and family roles. In Hungary, we were raised with a very different mindset—one shaped by historical suppression and economic instability.

But even within each culture, family inheritance plays a considerable role. What trauma did the family carry? Were they descended from enslaved people, refugees, or those living in systemic poverty? Did their family endure war or genocide? These things shape us, even if they happened generations ago.

And we can't talk about culture without acknowledging historical trauma. Hungary has been under occupation and suppression repeatedly—under the Ottomans, then as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then under Soviet rule. These layers of control left deep cultural scars. It's no surprise that finding one's voice and asserting autonomy remains difficult for many Hungarians.

The U.S. has its parallel legacy—slavery, Indigenous genocide, war, systemic racism. World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War—these events profoundly shaped families and cultural norms here. Those inherited traumas are still present, even if not openly acknowledged.

So, while culture lays the foundation, individual family systems—how those broader patterns get passed down—ultimately shape the parent-child dynamic. Healing happens when we address both.

Jacobsen: When you work with a client, at what point do you find responsible termination of the client-therapist relationship is appropriate? In other words, what are some deep signals that a person is sufficiently recentered and ready to go forward into their life independently—that they have the tools and are good to go?

Molnar: That's a great question. In most cases, the decision is in the hands of the client. They determine how many sessions they need and when they feel they have completed them.

Family constellation® work is not a traditional form of therapy. It's not like being in therapy for four years and attending sessions weekly or biweekly. Sometimes, it's a one-time experience. A

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client might come in and say, “I have this specific issue, and I want to resolve it.” And after one session, they feel a fundamental shift and say, “I’m fine now.” That’s valid.

When that happens, I usually follow up with them—checking in two to three weeks later to see how they’re integrating the experience.

Other clients come in with a series of interconnected issues—let’s say abuse, cancer or war-related trauma. Because those types of traumas can stem from both sides of the family, and it’s often layered, one session won’t be enough. In those cases, clients might commit to four, five, or six sessions. And each time, we go deeper.

But we can only go as deep as the soul allows in any given session. Sometimes, something needs to settle or heal over the following weeks before we can move to the next layer of the onion. So, the pacing is very intuitive and client-led.

I always tell them, “If you feel called to continue, reach out. If you want to go deeper into a specific topic, I’m here.” But ultimately, they know. They feel that more work is needed.

And yes, there have been cases where a client completed six sessions and then disappeared—ghosted, as people say. That’s okay, too. It’s not like traditional therapy because it works at the root level. Some people get what they came for and move on. I never push.

For others, they come back when they’re ready to work on another layer—whether it’s relationships, financial patterns, or self-worth. The family constellation® opens that door, and they decide whether or not to walk through it again.

Jacobsen: What therapeutic method, when dealing with family dynamics, has the most evidence behind it? Of course, there are established, authoritative models—modalities that are backed by research and applied based on the practitioner’s training and the client’s needs. But across the board, what tends to be effective for most family contexts?

Molnar: That depends heavily on the person—their personality, their openness, and their life circumstances.

Traditional therapy, including cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), is still the most widely used and researched. It’s also the most accessible—it’s covered by insurance, which makes a significant difference for many people. Finances play a substantial role in determining the type of therapy someone chooses.

Family constellation®, on the other hand, is less known in the U.S. It originated in Germany and is much more popular in parts of Europe and South America. Many people here have never heard of it.

I’ll be honest—I’m not familiar with *every* therapy model out there, and I don’t try to pretend otherwise. I don’t like to claim that one method is objectively better than another. It depends on what works for *you.*

I tried several modalities. For me, the family constellation® resonated with my soul. It took me down to the roots of my issues and then helped lift me back up. I spent two and a half years in

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traditional therapy, but I always felt like I was scratching the surface when it came to family dynamics.

That's why I emphasize finding what works for *you.* What brings clarity, emotional release, and integration? That's what matters most.

Jacobsen: When it comes to background checks—not in terms of criminal history but in terms of credentials and qualifications—what should someone do before starting therapy? How can they make sure the therapist is appropriate and adequately trained and that the treatment offered is legitimate?

Molnar: I always recommend doing some research. Check reviews if you can—Google reviews, therapist directories, or, if you're going through insurance, look at their provider network. Many platforms also offer client feedback and credentials.

But beyond reviews, I *highly* recommend having a conversation with the therapist before starting sessions. That initial conversation is key. You need to feel aligned with the therapist's energy, values, and communication style. Therapy is a profoundly personal journey, and if the connection doesn't feel right from the start, the work won't be as practical as it could be.

Jacobsen: Right, no need to go too deep into ethics codes or licensure requirements—most laypeople need to confirm credentials and have a sense of whether the person is trustworthy and professional.

Molnar: That's usually enough for most people to make an informed choice.

Jacobsen: What's one of your favourite quotes related to family therapy?

Molnar: One that changed my life is from Carl Jung: "Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life, and you will call it fate."

That's how I see family constellation® work. You're living on autopilot until you bring those invisible family bonds and inherited issues into the light. Once you do, you can finally choose your path with awareness.

Jacobsen: A classic therapist move—Jung, Frankl, Nietzsche! [Laughing]

Molnar: Always! [Laughing] It's true, though—we all go back to them for a reason.

Jacobsen: I'm out of questions, Blanka. Thank you so much for your time today. I appreciate your expertise—it was a pleasure to meet you.

Molnar: Thank you, Scott. It was lovely to be here and to have this conversation. I appreciate the platform.

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Healing Parent–Adult Child Relationships: Kan Yan on Reframing, Responsibility, and Emotional Growth

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Kan Yan, host of *Parents Reimagined*, about how adult children can heal, reframe, and redefine relationships with their parents. A Harvard-trained lawyer and former McKinsey consultant, Yan shares insights on intergenerational trauma, cultural identity, and emotional maturity—particularly within immigrant and Asian American families. He emphasizes shifting from an "adult–child" to an "adult-adult" relationship, the role of self-empathy in conflict resolution, and the uneven emotional capacities between parents and children. The conversation explores psychological development, cultural framing, and the importance of embracing past experiences to foster honest and respectful connections.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So today we're here with Kan Yan. He is the host of *Parents Reimagined*, a podcast that shares authentic stories of healing and transformation in parent–adult-child relationships. Kan is a Harvard-trained lawyer and a former McKinsey consultant. He speaks and writes on topics including family estrangement, intergenerational trauma, and Asian American identity.

Based in Berkeley, California, Kan explores how immigrant families navigate cultural identity, boundaries, and reconciliation—particularly within the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community. His work uplifts voices centred on reparenting, breaking cycles of fear and shame, and fostering connection without bypassing pain. Through *Parents Reimagined*, he offers practical tools for rebuilding relationships grounded in truth, accountability, and emotional healing. So what tends to make people feel most supported by their parents—and what can break that feeling of support?

Kan Yan: Supported. Are you talking about children or adults?

Jacobsen: Adult children.

Yan: Adult children. Wow, I might say that's not quite the right question—because by the time you're asking it, a lot has already happened that determines whether or not someone feels supported. So I'd say, in general, there are maybe two phases.

Whether someone feels supported often depends on how their childhood went. For example, based on your story, if I were in your position, I might have some resentments or grievances toward my dad. And it can be tough to feel supported by someone toward whom you have unresolved resentment or pain.

That's one phase of the relationship.

In my work with adult children, we focus on moving through those resentments and reaching a place of acceptance. That way, we can build an adult-adult relationship where I no longer expect my parent to have been the parents I needed as a child. Instead, I accept them for who they are now—with appropriate boundaries to ensure my needs are respected—and I explore what might still be possible in the relationship.

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That might involve seeking support from them if they can provide it. And it might not.

Jacobsen: Now, in terms of a lot that has already happened in childhood—such that an adult child is asking this kind of question—what are some key signs that things went wrong earlier in life? What are the flipside indicators? That is when things have gone *well enough* in childhood. I believe there's this concept of the "good enough" parent—so if things were generally healthy, the question still arises, but not from a place of trauma or deeply fractured relationships.

Yan: Yes, that's a tough question because it assumes there's some objective answer. And maybe there isn't. There might only be a probabilistic one.

But I would say when it comes to "good enough," it's subjective, based on the child's inner world as well. Like, I interview people who had terrible—what you might call objectively terrible—physically abusive, emotionally abusive childhoods. And, you know, they've managed to come through to the other side pretty well.

Other kids had relatively pleasant childhoods—free of any obvious abuse, maybe some emotional absence or something like that—and yet they end up struggling with mental health issues that get projected onto the parents. So it's not as clear-cut as, "If you turn these knobs in childhood, you get a perfectly well-adjusted kid on the other side."

I had another thought, but I lost it. Let's take a moment to track. I think maybe what matters more—because what I take away from your question is, "If I'm an adult child, what are the conditions that allow me to be well-adjusted enough to have a healthy relationship with my parent?" Is that kind of the sense of the question?

Jacobsen: That's fair.

Yan: In a way, in my work, I find that if you had an abusive, damaging, traumatic childhood, it's harder to get to the place of having a healthy relationship with your parent. It's not impossible—it's just harder.

And like I said before, because it's subjective, just because you had a relatively pleasant childhood doesn't mean it's necessarily easy to get to that place either. However, I would say that what is common is that getting to that place tends to require shifting from an adult–child dynamic to an adult-adult dynamic.

And part of that shift relates to what I mentioned earlier—accepting the childhood you had. And then, from there, relating from, "Okay, this is who you are. I'm not holding any resentment against you for the way you were—or are. I'm just relating to you as you are today. And from here, what's possible?"

Jacobsen: What does being close to a parent mean to you?

Yan: [Laughing] I'm giving you a lot of "it depends" answers because it's complex.

Jacobsen: [Laughing] Sure. Yes, I'm asking for single answers on the very, very complex subject matter.

Yan: This is a question about human development. What's possible in terms of closeness between any two people—not just a child and a parent—depends on their development.

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Let's say, psychologically—that's one way to phrase it—as human beings. The closeness between two five-year-olds is different from that between two thirteen-year-olds or two fifty-year-olds.

And some people finish their development at earlier or later stages in their lives. So, there's not one definition of what closeness is. And it's not dependent on age. Once you become an adult, it depends on whether you have the conditions and circumstances that allow you to develop into further stages of maturity as a person.

And then the capacity for closeness is dependent upon the level of maturation you reach as a person.

The same is true with a child and a parent.

Jacobsen: So, a lot of this is rooted in a sense of perspective and framing. An individual who may have gone through a very unpleasant upbringing—by some objective metric—might end up mentally healthier than someone who went through something like the opposite. It depends, in part, on how each person frames their experience. That internal framing has a huge impact on how the experience is translated into their state of mind and mental health later on. So, how flexible is an individual's framing of these early life circumstances as we develop in our formative years?

Yan: Now you're asking just about the deepest question you can ask about the essence of being human. Not only am I not qualified to answer it definitively, but there may not *be* an answer.

The way you answer that question reflects your entire philosophy of what it means to be a human being. The spectrum goes all the way from a kind of fatalism—"I don't control anything; it's all just particles moving by physics"—to an existentialist view: "I'm choosing the narrative I hold about reality, and that choice frames the possibility set of my life."

Jacobsen: How does that latter category not become dissociation?

Yan: Well, I think they're quite different.

Having an existential philosophical frame for life is a conscious choice about how you make sense of reality. Dissociation, to me, happens at a nervous system level—it's about one's relationship to the body, to sensation, and the alignment (or misalignment) between mind and body.

You can be disembodied or dissociated, regardless of your philosophy. A person could be dissociated while holding any philosophy, even an existentialist philosophy

Jacobsen: What are the cultural constructions around all this? To use the broad stereotypes: America is highly individualistic; other cultures are stereotypically collectivistic. How do those different cultural frames—which people may not have much control over—impact the ebb and flow of family relationships and their capacity to reframe of their experiences of existentialism to "I have infinite free will"?

Yan: And I'm going to choose not to answer that question *exactly* as asked. But I'll answer something I think is related. The question becomes: how does culture influence the dynamics

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between adult children and their parents? And what's possible in terms of connection or repair within that cultural context? I mean, we're getting very heady here. I mean, the frame of reference

The way we even think about what matters is shaped by culture. So if we're thinking on an individual level—like, even the very frame of asking this question about an adult child and a parent and what their relationship is like—that's already a kind of individualistically framed question, right? We're not asking, "What is the harmonious nature of the family unit as a whole, or how does that unit function within society?"

That might be a different question. But within the individualistic frame, culture still matters. And we can revisit the concept of developmental stages. How developed a society is—economically, for example—influences the capacity of its individuals to focus on their personal development.

If I'm trying to figure out how to feed myself and my family, my psychological development is likely to be lower than if I have the time and resources to read, reflect, and pursue personal growth. This issue often arises in my work with immigrants. A lot of immigrant parents, especially those from the developing world, didn't have the time or privilege to reflect deeply on these matters. Their focus was on survival.

And so the gulf between them and their children—especially children who grow up in more developed places like the United States—can be quite wide. That gap tends to be wider than if those parents had also grown up in the U.S., for example. And again, that goes back to developmental differences.

Jacobsen: We can reduce the headiness a bit—we'll turn that dial down a little. People get in fights. They yell. They scream. They swear. They slur. They blush in anger. These sorts of things. They get exasperated.They lose their words in frustration. They perspirate. All sorts of things happen.

So let's say there's a heated argument between an adult child and an adult parent—let's say within an American, middle-income household–whatever it is in Berkeley.

What are effective methods for cooling things down, bridging the gap of misunderstanding, and rebuilding trust and connection? In other words, how do we "judo" these moments—turning conflict into opportunities for trust-building and deeper connection?

Yan: There are three key points to consider here.

One is that, especially for the adult child, if you carry a lot of lingering resentment toward your parent, a conflict may feel more intense than it is. You might be perceiving your parent through a wounded lens, where everything they say lands as an insult or an attack—even if a third-party observer wouldn't see it that way. Therefore, developing metacognition and self-awareness in those moments is crucial.

Second, there's actual skill involved in having a heated conversation. There's a whole body of work around this. One of my favourites is Nonviolent Communication—that's a method I've trained in. It teaches people how to express themselves clearly while also deeply listening to others. That's a really important tool.

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And third: capacity. And this ties back to the developmental issue. Not everyone has the same emotional capacity in a given moment—or in general—to regulate themselves, stay connected, and have productive conflict. So, part of the work is understanding and honouring the capacity of everyone involved.

Whoever has more capacity to engage in a heated conversation holds more responsibility. It's very tempting—especially for the adult child—to think, *Well, you're my parent, so you should show up with more maturity, take responsibility, apologize, and handle this better.*

However, if the parent has a lower developmental capacity than the adult child, they *cannot*. Or even if they *can*, it's much harder for them than it would be for you—someone who has had more capacity, opportunity, and personal development in this area.

So part of reaching an adult-adult relationship is acknowledging, *Hey, we're both adults, but that doesn't mean we're equal.* And whoever has *more* capacity necessarily holds *more* responsibility—especially if we're going to have a harmonious, nourishing conversation that addresses friction between us.

Jacobsen: For Nonviolent Communication, what is a good tactic for recentering so you can have an accurate assessment?

Yan: Yeah, sure. In NVC, that's called *self-empathy*. If I'm dysregulated, how do I support myself to become more regulated? That's the essence of self-empathy.

And it depends on the person. For some people, taking space alone to reground. For others, it might involve using a somatic technique—like *tapping*, if you're familiar with Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT).

Some people might need to process with someone else—that could be a friend, a therapist, or a coach. There isn't one single way. But in the context of NVC, we call that self-empathy: *How do I give myself the emotional nutrients I need to get grounded again and more?*

Jacobsen: Do you have any favourite quotes about parent and adult-child relationships?

Yan: The Ram Dass quote is, "If you think you're enlightened, go spend a week with your parents."

Jacobsen: [Laughing] I should end with Ram Dass and Tim Leary—that'd be fun. I think, in the long view, their philosophies won out—at least in California. Thank you very much for your time today. It's always fun talking to people who know what the hell they're talking about.

Yan: Thanks, Scott. Take care. Bye.

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Pornography's Impact on Youth, Consent, and Culture: An Interview with Dr. Gail Dines

2025/07/17

Part 1 of 2

Dr. Gail Dines is the Founder and CEO of Culture Reframed and Professor Emerita of Sociology and Women's Studies at Wheelock College, Boston. With over 30 years of research on the pornography industry, she is recognized globally as a leading expert on how pornography shapes society, culture, and sexuality. Dr. Dines has served as a consultant to governmental agencies in the U.S. and internationally, including the UK, Norway, Iceland, and Canada. In 2016 she founded Culture Reframed, where she continues to champion education around the harms of pornography. Dr. Dines is also the co-editor of the best-selling textbook Gender, Race and Class in Media and the author of Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality, which has been translated into five languages and adapted into a documentary film. Her work has been featured in major media outlets, including ABC, CNN, BBC, MSNBC, The New York Times, Time, The Guardian, and Vogue. Dr. Dines is a regular guest on television and radio and is prominently featured in documentaries such as The Price of Pleasure and The Strength to Resist.

Dines outlines over 40 years of research linking pornography to sexual aggression, violence against women, and the erosion of healthy relationships. Dines contrasts radical and liberal feminist perspectives, critiques the porn industry's exploitative tactics, and highlights how pornography serves as inadequate sex education for youth. She argues for porn-resilient education and supports survivors navigating trauma. Dines warns that mainstream pornography normalizes misogyny, racism, and coercion, undermining consent and equality at every societal level.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Professor Gail Dines, also founder of **Culture Reframed**. My first question, Gail: what is the connection between pornography and violence against women?

Professor Gail Dines: We have over 40 years of empirical research from different disciplines that show that boys and men who consume pornography are more likely to engage in sexually aggressive behaviour, more likely to accept rape myths, more likely to develop harmful sexual attitudes toward women, and may experience increased anxiety, depression, and reduced empathy for victims of sexual violence. This happens because they are repeatedly exposed to depictions of sexual violence and objectification. Most mainstream internet pornography today is hardcore—it's cruel, brutal, and dehumanizing toward women.

As men and boys watch and become aroused by it, they internalize the ideologies embedded in these images. A key point about pornography is that it portrays women as always consenting, no matter how degrading or violent the act is. This gives the impression that women enjoy being mistreated, which is often far from the truth, as they may be coerced or paid to act in these scenes. This reinforces the harmful idea that it is acceptable to dehumanize and abuse women. We have substantial peer-reviewed research from fields such as psychology, sociology, and media studies that corroborates these findings.

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Jacobsen: What research links pornography to sexual aggression?

Dines: Regarding the research linking pornography to sexual aggression, our website, **culturereframed.org**, offers fact sheets. One in particular, titled "**Understanding The Harms of Pornography**," lists many studies. Additionally, our academic library contains over 500 peer-reviewed articles on this topic. Scholars such as Paul Wright, Chyng Sun, and Jennifer Johnson have contributed important work. The strength of social science research is not in isolated studies but in the coherent pattern that emerges when we review a large body of work. The research shows a clear correlation between pornography consumption and violence against women.

Jacobsen: How does hypersexualized media align with human rights violations, particularly about youth?

Dines: Hypersexualized media, even content that isn't classified as pornography, and pornography itself can be viewed as violations of civil rights because they infringe on young people's ability to construct their sexuality. The multi-billion-dollar media and pornography industries are shaping the sexual attitudes and behaviours of young people worldwide, which strips them of their autonomy in this area. These industries commodify and monetize sexuality, taking control away from individuals and turning it into a product.

Young people deserve the opportunity to develop a sexuality that is meaningful to them, not one dictated by the interests of pornographers seeking profit. Additionally, there are significant human rights violations against women in pornography. The treatment many women endure in the production of hardcore pornography can be likened to torture, violating international human rights conventions. If the same acts were done to any other group, they would likely be recognized as torture. That's how extreme much of mainstream pornography has become.

Jacobsen: What are the social and health consequences of pornography consumption?

Dines: Basically, pornography is shifting how we think about women, men, sex, relationships, connection, and consent—all of these issues. What you see in society is that when pornography becomes the "wallpaper" of your life, as it does for young people today, it becomes the main form of sex education. This shifts the norms and values of the culture, and it's happening internationally. This is not a local problem. Any child with a device connected to the internet is being fed a steady diet of misogyny and racism—there's an incredible amount of racism in pornography—and the idea that men and boys have a right to ownership of women's bodies, regardless of what women want. There's also the notion that women's bodies exist to be commodified and used however men wish. This sets up women and girls to be victims of male violence. Meanwhile, we are trying to build a world of equality between men and women.

Pornography shreds that possibility—not only in terms of sex but also in employment, the legal system, and more. It sends the message that women exist only to be penetrated, and often in the most vile and cruel ways possible. So, pornography undermines women's rights across multiple levels and within multiple institutions.

Jacobsen: You raised an interesting point about the nature of consent. What is the framework of consent in pornographic imagery and in the industry itself?

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Dines: First, let's start with the imagery because the industry is slightly different. In the images, she consents to everything. The one word you rarely hear in pornography is "no." It's rare. If you go onto Pornhub or YouTube, where most men and boys consume pornography, you won't hear "no." Now, there are some rape porn sites where the woman says "no," but those are at the far end of the spectrum. I study mainstream pornography, such as what's on Pornhub. In terms of consent, we never know if a woman truly consents; this is where the industry comes in. While they might sign a consent form, we don't know under what conditions it was signed.

Also, pornography is where racism, sexism, capitalism, and colonialism intersect. The poorer a woman is, the more likely she will be a woman of colour with fewer resources, and the more likely she is to end up in the porn industry. These are not Ivy League graduates lining up to do this. These are women who have had few choices. When you have limited options in life, especially due to economic hardship, you cannot freely argue that consent is fully informed or voluntary.

Jacobsen: For those able to exit the industry, what are the ways they manage to do so, and what are the psychological and emotional impacts, as well as the physical effects?

Dines: It's extremely hard for women to leave pornography. First of all, we know that women in pornography experience the same levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as prostituted women. Many of them are also under pimp control. The psychological, emotional, and physical tolls are severe, making it difficult for them to leave the industry.

And also, where are you going to go? Especially in pornography, where your image is everywhere, women who have been in the industry, even if they get out, live in constant fear that their employers, children, and partners will find their images or even their next-door neighbours. The issue becomes extremely difficult. You never really escape pornography once you've been part of it. Even if you leave the industry, you're never fully out of it because your image remains online. It can take many years to recover emotionally and physically.

Many women endure severe physical harm—STIs and injuries to the anus, vagina, and mouth due to the hardcore nature of the acts. What's interesting is that, in the case of prostitution and trafficking, there are many survivor-led groups helping women exit the industry. This support isn't as prevalent for women in pornography, and the reason is that these women feel so exposed. They feel vulnerable even after leaving the industry because their images remain there.

Remember, an image on Pornhub can go viral, spreading across all the porn sites, so you never know who has seen it. You never know if the person you meet has seen it, which creates a constant feeling of vulnerability.

Jacobsen: You made an important distinction between liberal feminism and radical feminism. Can you clarify that distinction about pornography?

Dines: Yes. The critical distinction is in the ideological framing. Radical feminists were among the first to highlight the violence of pornography—both in terms of the harm to women in the industry and the impact on women in the society. Radical feminism grew out of a focus on violence against women. Over time, they recognized that pornography is part of that violence.

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Liberal feminism, on the other hand, tends to be more neoliberal, emphasizing individualism. The argument often centers around the idea that "she chose it," that it's about sexual agency. But what we know about these women is that this is not a true sexual agency. If anything, it strips them of their sexual agency and does the same to all women. Women often look at pornography to see what they should be doing for the men who consume it. Radical feminists are anti-pornography because they see both its production and consumption as a major form of violence against women, and they understand that it contributes to real-world violence as well.

Jacobsen: What are the tactics of the pornography industry, and how are they similar to those of the tobacco industry?

Dines: The pornography industry employs tactics similar to the tobacco industry, such as bringing in pseudo-academics to argue that there's no harm, framing research in ways that downplay the issues, and lobbying. The pornography industry has a powerful lobbying arm, much like the tobacco industry did. They know the harm their product causes, but they're not interested in liberating women from harm—they're in it to make money.

And so, all predatory industries will do whatever it takes to make money, irrespective of the incredible social impact it will have. The United States is known for not having as strong a FACTED (Family Life and Sexual Health Education) program as Canada. However, Canada, at its best, still has its gaps.

Jacobsen: So, how does pornography act, as you mentioned earlier, as a filler for sex education and a particularly poor one for young people, and potentially for older people who missed it?

Dines: Let's focus on younger people. Developing an interest in sex, is a natural part of development, often starting from puberty But because we don't have good sex education—even in U.S. states that are required to provide it—the content is outdated and doesn't speak to the reality that kids live in today. So where are kids going to turn when they have access to devices and a vast amount of free pornography? Pornography fills that gap, but poorly.

What is needed, and what Culture Reframed provides, is a porn-critical sex education curriculum. If you visit our website, we have a program for high school teachers (and some middle school teachers), which includes PowerPoints and detailed instructions on how to teach it. We don't show pornography, obviously, but we focus on building porn-resilient young people. Unfortunately, in many cases, sex education isn't prioritized, and many sex ed teachers aren't even specialized in the subject.

They might be math or physical education teachers, told a month before, "You're teaching sex ed." We frequently hear from people who are unprepared and have no idea where to start. Interestingly, studies show that students immediately pick up on this lack of expertise. Research indicates that students are aware that their sex ed teachers don't know how to teach the subject, don't want to do it, and aren't addressing issues relevant to their lives. As a result, sex education has effectively been handed over to pornographers.

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Radical Feminist Perspectives on Pornography: An In-Depth Conversation with Dr. Gail Dines

2025/07/18

Part 2 of 2

Dr. Gail Dines is the Founder and CEO of Culture Reframed and Professor Emerita of Sociology and Women's Studies at Wheelock College, Boston. With over 30 years of research on the pornography industry, she is recognized globally as a leading expert on how pornography shapes society, culture, and sexuality. Dr. Dines has served as a consultant to governmental agencies in the U.S. and internationally, including the UK, Norway, Iceland, and Canada. In 2016 she founded Culture Reframed, where she continues to champion education around the harms of pornography. Dr. Dines is also the co-editor of the best-selling textbook Gender, Race and Class in Media and the author of Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality, which has been translated into five languages and adapted into a documentary film. Her work has been featured in major media outlets, including ABC, CNN, BBC, MSNBC, The New York Times, Time, The Guardian, and Vogue. Dr. Dines is a regular guest on television and radio and is prominently featured in documentaries such as The Price of Pleasure and The Strength to Resist.

Dines explores the profound societal harms of pornography. She discusses the rare internal disagreements within radical feminism, the contrast with moralist objections, and how pornography erodes healthy sexuality, consent, and gender equality. Dines argues pornography acts as a distorted form of sex education and a driver of sexual violence, dehumanization, and disconnection. Drawing on extensive research and her book Pornland, she advocates for porn-resilient education and a public reckoning with how adult inaction leaves youth vulnerable to exploitation, addiction, and long-term psychological harm.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: A question comes to mind. We've discussed liberal feminism versus radical feminism in framing the issue. But within radical feminist discourse, are there any internal objections or disagreements on this critical view of pornography?

Dr. Gail Dines: Radical feminism tends to agree widely on this topic. Are you asking about internal conflicts?

Jacobsen: Yes, specifically within radical feminism.

Dines: Any disagreements are quite minor, mostly around how to define the issue or how to address it. But there's a strong, unified belief within radical feminism that pornography is violence against women, both in its production and consumption. We have major arguments with liberal feminists, Marxist feminists, and socialist feminists. We don't tend to have many internal debates about pornography within radical feminism. However, we do have disagreements on other topics.

Jacobsen: There may be surface-level critiques from traditionalist, conservative, or religious groups that object to pornography on moral grounds, often based on a transcendentalist or ethical view of sin. Yet, they seem to reach a similar conclusion as you do…

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Dines: Yes, but the conclusions, although they may appear similar, are quite different. Right-wing moralists are often concerned with what pornography does to the family, particularly how it affects men. They argue that it may cause men to stray or damage family cohesion. Radical feminists, on the other hand, have a critique of the family as the place where women are most at risk, as we know from the evidence. We are concerned with the harm to women, children, and society in general, but our stance is not based on moralism.

We refer to this as a harm-based issue, not a morality-based issue. That's not to say some right-wing organizations don't adopt some of our arguments—they do—but the core driving force behind our opposition to pornography is different. They oppose it from a moral perspective; we oppose it because of the real harm it inflicts on individuals and society.

Jacobsen: What would a healthy societal view of sexuality and sex education look like?

Dines: Much of what we've built on Culture Reframed is what that should look like, to be honest. By the way, all our programs are free. You do have to sign up, but it's entirely free. A healthy view of sexuality begins with the individual owning their sexuality. It evolves naturally as a person grows. Of course, it's rooted in equality, consent, non-violence, and genuine connection and intimacy.

This doesn't mean that sex is only for marriage or long-term relationships but that there is some level of connection and intimacy involved. That's what makes sex meaningful in the end. If you don't know the person you're having sex with, as is often the pornography case, it quickly becomes boring. That's why pornographers constantly escalate the content—more violence, more extreme acts—because standard sex gets boring for viewers users become desensitized.

If you were to film regular people having sex, most of the time, it would be so dull that you'd fall asleep watching it. The fun and excitement come from actually having sex, not watching it. So, for pornography to hold viewers' interest, they have to keep ramping up the adrenaline through more intense and bizarre acts.

Jacobsen: Is part of the core issue the dehumanization and depersonalization that comes with pornography? It seems like there's a disconnection—people go to their computers, consume pornography, and then return to their regular lives as if nothing happened. It's like their day becomes fragmented and disjointed.

Dines: Absolutely. That's a great point. There have been studies done on this. One interesting study showed two groups of men: one group watched a regular National Geographic movie, while the other watched pornography. Afterward, they were asked to interview a female candidate for a job, and the chairs were on rollers. The men who had watched pornography kept rolling their chairs closer and closer to the woman. They also found that these men couldn't remember the woman's words.

This kind of behaviour shows how pornography impacts boys and men's perception of others, particularly women, and how it disrupts their ability to interact meaningfully in real-life situations.

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They were too busy checking her out. So you're right. When you think about it, much pornography is consumed at work. Then you leave that cruel world where men are depicted as having every right to women's bodies and go back to working in a world with women where you don't have those rights. It's interesting because we have the Me Too movement on the one hand, which is crucial for explaining what's going on. On the other hand, pornography is working against everything the Me Too movement is trying to say about consent and women's bodily integrity. Even men's bodily integrity is compromised in pornography—nobody has bodily integrity.

In pornography, the body is there to be used in any way possible to heighten sexual arousal, usually involving high levels of violence. I haven't seen many films where this wasn't the case.

Jacobsen: We've already covered building porn resilience in children, or at least how important it is. How far do gender inequality and sexual violence reflect each other in women's rights movements, particularly within the frame of pornography?

Dines: Let me make sure I understand. You're asking about the relationship between gender inequality and sexual violence and how this plays out in the context of movements like Me Too, correct?

Jacobsen: Yes.

Dines: I addressed some of this earlier when I talked about equality in other areas of life and how pornography undermines it. Gender inequality and sexual violence are deeply intertwined. If there were no gender inequality, sexual violence would be unthinkable. Sexual violence is typically used to destroy and control women and to show power and dominance. That's why we must call it "sexual violence"—because it weaponizes sex against women.

Without gender inequality, this kind of violence wouldn't even be conceivable. It's built into the very structure of gender inequality, and in turn, it perpetuates and exacerbates that inequality. It's a vicious cycle. Gender inequality fuels sexual violence, and sexual violence deepens gender inequality.

Jacobsen: Just to be mindful of that, then. We talked about the psychological impact earlier. What are the similar psychological impacts on boys and girls, rather than the differences?

Dines: Similarities around what, specifically?

Jacobsen: In terms of pornography consumption and its impacts.

Dines: We know very little about girls. There aren't many studies at all on girls' exposure to pornography, and, as in many areas, girls and women are often under-researched. One of the few studies by Chyng Sun, Jennifer Johnson, Anna Bridges, and Matt Ezzell does show a few things. Some girls and women go to porn not to masturbate but to see what boys and men are doing, so they can reproduce that behaviour.

They also found that girls and women who become addicted to pornography, similar to men, lose interest in real-world sex, preferring pornography. They become isolated and depressed. So, if

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they do go down the route of addiction, the impact is quite similar to that on men, except they don't become violent.

Jacobsen: What are the key points of feminist and anti-pornography activism, particularly in your book *Pornland*, intersecting with issues of gender, sexuality, and human rights?

Dines: That's what the whole book is about. *Pornland* was written to explain the modern-day pornography industry in the age of the internet. People were talking about pornography as if the internet hadn't happened. I take a radical feminist perspective, using research to back up the claims and focus on how pornography undermines women's human rights.

There are chapters addressing racism, showing how women of colour are especially targeted, both for their race and gender. I also discuss how mainstream sites are increasingly making use of images of young looking women—sometimes they could be children, it's hard to tell. So, they might be underage or made to look underage.

The main argument is that we live in a world that is completely inundated and infested with pornography. As a sociologist, I'm interested in the sociological impact. I borrow from psychological literature but focus on the macro level. How is pornography not just shifting gender norms but cementing the worst aspects of them? It hasn't invented misogyny, but it has given it a new twist and continues to reinforce it across various institutions.

Jacobsen: Gail, any final thoughts or feelings based on our conversation today?

Dines: We've buried our heads in the sand for too long. For people who weren't born into the internet age, it's hard to understand just how much pornography is shaping young people. There's been a massive dereliction of duty on the part of adults in helping kids navigate this world they've been thrown into, often left to sink or swim on their own—and many are sinking. The kids I talk to feel overwhelmed by pornography, and studies back this up. Many wish there were far less of it because they recognize the negative effect it has on their sexuality, their connections, and their relationships.

So, it's time we step up and take responsibility as adults.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Gail.

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Cultural Integrity Without Supernaturalism: Eru Hiko-Tahuri on Being a Māori Atheist in a Post-Christian New Zealand

2025/07/23

Part 5 of 5

Eru Hiko-Tahuri, a Māori creative and author of *Māori Boy Atheist*, explores his journey from religious upbringing to secular humanism. Hiko-Tahuri discusses cultural tensions as a Māori atheist, advocating for respectful integration of Māori values like manaakitanga and whanaungatanga within secular contexts. Hiko-Tahuri reflects on secular life as a Māori creative in a post-Christian Aotearoa. He shares experiences balancing cultural heritage with nonbelief, writing secular karakia, creating inclusive art, and challenging assumptions around Indigenous identity, civic rituals, and institutionalized spirituality in Māori public life.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So, when you begin mapping the geography of Māori secularism—as a relatively new concept—are there any aspects of traditional Māori governance that could be considered appropriately secular? That is, are there spaces where ritual or spiritual practices are distinctly set apart or is everything more or less integrated?

Eru Hiko-Tahuri: So, in most traditional Māori contexts, everything tends to be intertwined—spiritual, social, political, and cultural dimensions are not separated in the Western sense. In that way, Māori culture is similar to many traditional religious cultures, where secularism, as we understand it in liberal democracies, was never really a category.

Jacobsen: Now, *tapu*—the concept of sacredness or restriction in Māori culture—retains significant cultural power. But from a secular Māori perspective, like yours, *tapu* can be understood metaphorically rather than metaphysically. It functions symbolically to mark respect, boundaries, or social norms rather than indicating belief in the supernatural. What does that mean in practical terms?

Hiko-Tahuri: Take *karakia*, for example—these are often translated as prayers or incantations. I don't perform them myself. But in spaces where *karakia* are expected—such as ceremonial openings or public gatherings—I've written secular alternatives, essentially nonreligious invocations. I cannot authentically engage in the religious or supernatural aspects, but I *can* offer something meaningful and culturally respectful that fits the moment. That's how I bridge the gap: by replacing the supernatural element with a secular expression that still honours the cultural context.

Jacobsen: This reminds me of the situation in Canada. Canada is a federal state divided into municipalities, provinces, and territories, and then the national government, which is functionally similar to the U.S. structure of counties, states, and federal governance. In 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay (City)* that opening municipal council meetings with prayer violated the state's duty of religious neutrality. It effectively made official prayers at government meetings unconstitutional.

Following that decision, organizations like the British Columbia Humanist Association began investigating compliance across municipalities. Despite the ruling, they found that many local

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governments continued to include prayer in official meetings. In response, the Association sent letters to these municipalities pointing out the legal ruling, sharing data, and urging them to comply with the law by removing religious observances from public sessions. This kind of advocacy led to meaningful change in some regions.

So, when I consider your experience, I think of it in that light. You're not opposing cultural participation or public service; instead, you're drawing a line where religious practices—like prayer—are included in civic spaces where they may no longer be appropriate, especially in pluralistic or post-colonial contexts. Countries like Aotearoa, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the United States, and South Africa all fall under the category of "post-colonial" states grappling with how to reconcile Indigenous traditions, secular governance, and religious pluralism.

So, let us return to the historical backdrop. Christian missionary efforts primarily drove colonization in Aotearoa, New Zealand. I understand that many of those involved were of European heritage—like my own. When people refer to "post-colonial" in this context, they often mean a phase following that religious and political imposition—perhaps even envisioning a society in a reconciled, pluralistic state where Indigenous and settler cultures have negotiated a new equilibrium. Would you say that is accurate?

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes, that is broadly correct. Among post-colonial nations, I would say Aotearoa, New Zealand, has gone further than many in terms of acknowledging and integrating Māori language, culture, and perspectives into public life. You can see the effects of that on things like the census data. As of the most recent census, about 53% of New Zealanders identified as having no religion. That makes New Zealand a post-Christian country, at least in terms of demographic majority. Christianity is now a minority belief, which shifts the dynamics.

Jacobsen: And how does that shift affect your everyday life, particularly as someone who identifies as an atheist and a humanist? Does it allow you to live more comfortably and authentically?

Hiko-Tahuri: Absolutely. As I mentioned earlier, overt religiosity is a bit unusual here. People who are very religious are more of a minority now—and may be looked at as slightly outside the norm. The country itself is pretty secular. Yes, we still have prayers at the beginning of some public meetings, but those are more about tradition than belief in most cases. There are calls to remove such practices, and I support that. However, overall, New Zealand has a very relaxed and liberal society. People do not care what others believe or do not believe. There is a strong cultural inclination toward individual freedom and tolerance, so we rarely see heated debates or conflicts over religion here.

Jacobsen: Tell me more about your podcast, *Heretical*. Is it still running, and where can people find it?

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes, it is back. I originally launched it some time ago but had to pause due to other commitments. I have now restarted it. The first season includes 10 episodes, where I read my book chapter by chapter. The book is free—I never wrote it to make money; I wrote it to tell a story. That story forms the basis of the podcast. I have also added another episode where I talk about a strange encounter I had with what I would describe as a cult-like group who tried to

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recruit me. That experience was eye-opening and worth sharing. There will be more episodes in the future. I plan to delve into some of the more common arguments for theism—things like the cosmological argument—and explore why I do not find them convincing. These kinds of discussions are not often had within our community, so I think it is essential to create space for them.

Jacobsen: What about your music and your airbrush art? Do elements of secularism or humanism show up in those creative outlets?

Hiko-Tahuri: Not so much in my music, no. It is more of a personal expression, and I keep it separate from my secular identity. But everything I create reflects my worldview in some way, even if not explicitly.

I have been playing in the same band with friends for about 25 years now. We only get together to play once every five years or so these days, but we are just a bunch of old mates who enjoy making music together. I played my first gig when I was 14 years old for a country music club here in New Zealand. I got pulled into country music because there really were not many other musical options in the small town I grew up in.

Music has always been part of my life, but I have never chased fame or done it for recognition. I do it because I love it. The same goes for painting. I have created a few pieces where I've expressed thoughts on some of the more absurd or troubling beliefs in the Bible. For example, there is that passage—1 Timothy 2:12, I think—that says women should remain silent and not teach. I did a painting responding to that. I also painted a Celtic cross overlaid with Māori designs to symbolize how religion, especially Christianity, colonized us just as much as the English did. I have sold or given away some of those pieces, but really, art is something I do for personal fulfillment rather than profit.

Jacobsen: How do emerging networks like Māori atheist and freethinker communities offer space for collective doubt or help individuals express personal doubts within a shared context?

Hiko-Tahuri: That is a good question. I do not know if that is even the aim of the group I joined. It is not my group—I just found it and joined. For me, it was more about discovering that there were other people out there who think like me and also look like me. That alone was meaningful. We have not tried to turn it into a collective movement. Māori atheism is still in its infancy. Until I wrote my book, I had not encountered any serious discussion about it, at least not that I could find. That group did exist beforehand, but I stumbled upon it afterward.

So, right now, most of the Māori atheists I see are solo actors. We speak up when we feel like it, but there is no organized collective activism or shared identity. We are in such an early stage of development as a community that it has not yet coalesced into anything more structured or strategic.

Jacobsen: Since we last spoke, have you had any recent thoughts on the protocols and principles of Indigenous declarations?

Hiko-Tahuri: No, I have not looked into it lately. I know that the New Zealand government initially chose not to sign the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,

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though it eventually endorsed it in 2010. But beyond that, I have not followed recent developments very closely.

Jacobsen: I have not had a chance to read into some of those areas, but I would like to. What about the precise etiquette and civic customs—honouring those customs that come from the subculture while not reciting the prayers? What is the balance being struck there?

Hiko-Tahuri: Yeah, I think that is one of the most challenging parts—figuring out what you can do respectfully while maintaining personal integrity. If we are talking, for instance, about pōwhiri—that is, the formal welcome ceremony—part of that involves speech-making. And during those speeches, spiritual language is often invoked. It is hard to categorize it strictly as religious, but it carries spiritual overtones.

Navigating is a challenge because there is a specific formula for constructing those speeches within our culture. They follow a traditional structure that includes spiritual references—things I do not believe in. So, I often have to rework those parts, recreating the tone and form without the religious or supernatural elements. It is difficult and takes much careful thought. That is probably the main struggle for Māori atheists who speak the language and actively participate in cultural life. We are trying to maintain the integrity of our heritage while adapting it to a secular worldview.

Jacobsen: Have you ever had an experience—either due to your ethnic background or lack of belief—where someone got confrontational with you? The proverbial finger-wagging, shouting match? I cannot imagine that happening much to a Kiwi.

Hiko-Tahuri: No, we are generally not that confrontational in New Zealand. And there are a couple of practical reasons, too. Because of how I look—my physical presence—people usually do not get up in my face. I am around six feet tall, and I guess I have a face that might be intimidating. So, people do not tend to push those boundaries. I am not aggressive or threatening at all, but sometimes, just my appearance is enough to make people think twice.

Jacobsen: That reminds me—there was a story out of the U.S. involving Eminem. I think gang members were extorting him—either the Crips or the Bloods. But apparently, there was a Samoan-American gang so feared that even the Crips were hesitant around them. Eminem hired them for protection, and they ended up defending him and collaborating on music. I believe they even put out an album together.

It was a pretty wild story. It shows how much physical presence and group identity can shape interactions—whether in music, culture, or personal safety. It is funny how those dynamics play out in so many different places.

Hiko-Tahuri: It can be imposing. I am five-eleven, but I am not baby-faced. Still, I have heard of incidents where Māori women in New Zealand—especially those who wear *moko kauae*, the traditional tattoo—get hassled often.

Jacobsen: How so?

Hiko-Tahuri: By members of the public, saying things like, “You shouldn’t be here,” or “You look intimidating,” or “You shouldn’t be in this park.” One of these incidents happened just last

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year in a local park. A woman was told she could not be there when someone's kids were around, as if she was somehow threatening—just for wearing the *moko kauae*. These things do happen, particularly to women. I have noticed that it never happens to me. Maybe that has something to do with physical presence or perceived threat, but yes—it is a pattern. That does happen, and fairly often.

Jacobsen: I am out of the questions, too. So, am I missing anything? What do you think?

Hiko-Tahuri: I do not think so. I cannot think of anything else at the moment. That was a solid session.

Jacobsen: Thank you so much for today.

Hiko-Tahuri: Yes, that sounds great. Thank *you* very much.

Jacobsen: All right. Take care.

Hiko-Tahuri: You too. Bye.

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Emma Hathorn on First Date Red Flags, Authenticity, and Why Gen Z Is Redefining Modern Dating

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Emma Hathorn is a Dating Expert at Seeking.com, specializing in online dating, luxury relationships, and modern dating trends. She offers insights on age-gap dynamics, dating safety, and emotional connection. Frequently featured in major media outlets, she helps singles navigate relationships with clarity, confidence, and elevated standards. She emphasizes authenticity, intentional dating, and early communication, discussing red flags, boundary-setting, first-date cues, and the evolving priorities of Gen Z daters as they navigate meaningful, value-driven connections.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is your first sign that a first date is going well—or going badly?

Emma Hathorn: When you lose track of time. Everything flows naturally, and you are not stuck in your head or overanalyzing. It just feels easy. You are not thinking about what to say or how you look. That ease is a great sign. That is what a good conversation feels like. You stop checking the time or worrying about posture or manners. You are just comfortable.

Jacobsen: What typically signals that a date is going wrong?

Hathorn: When the conversation becomes unbalanced. One person overshares or dominates while the other listens. It is tough when someone dives into personal issues too soon. That intensity creates discomfort and imbalance.

Jacobsen: What is it like to be on the receiving end of that?

Hathorn: You feel stuck, unsure how to respond. You are polite while someone unloads their life story, and it is too much responsibility, too fast.

Jacobsen: Do certain traits make people more likely to struggle with setting boundaries when that happens?

Hathorn: Yes. At Seeking, we stress the importance of vetting someone first. A chat or video call before a meeting helps. With online dating, you do not know someone until you talk. Asking the right questions upfront helps avoid those boundary issues. Once you know what you are looking for, you can often spot red flags early—from their profile or first messages. Many uncomfortable situations can be avoided with early caution.

Jacobsen: So, it is wise to stay cautious, even if most people are decent.

Hathorn: Absolutely. The worst-case scenario we usually see is just awkwardness—when you are not on the same wavelength. At Seeking, we emphasize aligning values and knowing what you want going in. Intentional dating is a significant trend. People value their time and solitude more, and they are comfortable not dating unless it feels genuinely worthwhile.

So, when someone chooses to go on a date now, it is often very deliberate—focused on who the person is and what kind of connection they are looking for. It does not even have to be romantic. A meaningful conversation can be worth it all by itself.

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Jacobsen: What is a clear sign someone is being inauthentic—like they are not even in touch with themselves?

Hathorn: When the stories feel overblown—like they are trying too hard. Sure, some wild stories are true. However, when someone claims they started ten companies, went bungee jumping, and climbed Everest all in the same week—it feels performative.

Jacobsen: They started the companies *while* bungee jumping.

Hathorn: [Laughing] And if it is true—great. However, it often feels like a show rather than a genuine connection.

Jacobsen: Signing contracts midair.

Hathorn: Yes! However, inauthenticity is a tricky issue. It can be both hard and easy to read. You sense something is off.

Jacobsen: Is it a major turnoff?

Hathorn: Definitely—and it should be. An authentic person does not need validation from a date. They come in already knowing their value.

Jacobsen: Inauthenticity kills attraction.

Hathorn: Yes.

Jacobsen: Authenticity guarantees you know whether the real you are attracted to the other person. Some people are authentically unpleasant. That may only appeal to a few—but at least it is honest. If someone is faking it, you sense the tension behind the smile. It is like, "Why are you gritting your teeth while smiling?"

Hathorn: When people are authentic, you can quickly tell if there is chemistry—or not. And that matters. Everyone is busy, so when someone shows up as themselves, you immediately know if there is something there or not. You can decide not to see each other again—but at least it was real.

Jacobsen: How do you prepare for a first date? Stereotypically, guys might shower and shave. Women might spend two hours on makeup, hair, and picking the right outfit.

Hathorn: Yes—women do.

Jacobsen: Just the right outfit.

Hathorn: Absolutely. Women put in serious effort. Moreover, honestly, this often leads to another conversation—about who pays the bill.

Jacobsen: That is part two: "How to finish the first date."

Hathorn: [Laughing] Seriously, though—I have yet to meet a woman who does not do the hair, makeup, nails, everything.

Jacobsen: Why is it such an event? Usually, with gendered traits, there is some overlap—even if the curves are distinct. However, this one seems distinctly divided. Why do you think that is?

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Hathorn: Women invest so much time—and men often do not.

Jacobsen: Or they prepare in very different ways.

Hathorn: It is the anticipation. The idea that you might meet someone—is exciting. Despite the narrative that everyone's independent—and many are—it is still thrilling to think about finding a partner.

That initial rush builds up in the days leading up to the date. Moreover, beyond romance, it is simply lovely to show up for someone to put in the effort. This extends beyond gender—it also applies to queer relationships. Looking your best and making the effort feels good, especially since people go out less than they used to. So it becomes a little occasion.

Jacobsen: What about a date between two women—where both are looking for a connection, maybe some fun, a little wine and chocolate?

Hathorn: Great question. Women tend to put in more effort. I have dated women, and both parties have put in much effort. It felt equal. Honestly, it was refreshing.

Jacobsen: Was it a better experience?

Hathorn: Not necessarily. Most of my dating was in Tokyo, and I found that both men and women showed up well-prepared. Maybe that stereotype—that men shave and go—needs to change. Some men put in real effort, even if not in grooming. They may contribute in other ways—such as sending an Uber or ensuring things go smoothly. That effort matters, too. In queer relationships between women, there tends to be a greater balance in terms of effort.

Jacobsen: There is another angle. Some women do not want a guy who looks too polished. If he is plucking his eyebrows, highlighting his hair, and looking overly groomed—it might be a turn off. Not a red flag, just a turnoff.

Hathorn: Right.

Jacobsen: They want their guy a little scruffy.

Hathorn: Maybe "curated scruffy."

Jacobsen: Exactly! So, where is the line between curated scruff and the real thing, or even authenticity?

Hathorn: It is primarily aesthetic. Scruffy can mean facial hair or style—not necessarily a scruffy personality.

Jacobsen: That is true. I have worked in construction, restaurants, and a horse farm—some guys work with their hands and are dirty as hell but still have manners.

Hathorn: Absolutely.

Jacobsen: They may not be clean day to day, but they respect you, and they know how to show it. That takes skill. Honestly, if your exterior is rough, it can even distract you—but some still know how to show up with grace.

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Hathorn: And maybe that *is* super authentic—just showing up as yourself. There is another side to it, however. You could say, "Just come as you are." However, at the same time—it is still a date. If you are genuinely excited and enjoy getting ready, you should show that to your partner. It reflects something you value and may want in the relationship. It comes down to knowing what you want. Do you see yourself going to lovely places with this person? What kind of future do you imagine?

Jacobsen: That kind of future-oriented thinking—do you think it is gendered? The prep, the anticipation—does that reflect a different mindset across genders?

Hathorn: Possibly.

Jacobsen: That leads to something else. We have new terms for old things—"friends with benefits," "one-night stands." When people talk to you before a date or when you guide them on how to "do the date right," is it about encouraging clarity? Are there consistent patterns depending on whether they are looking for something short-term or long-term?

Hathorn: Yes. Those are very different conversations. The key is knowing what you are showing up for. It is hard to help someone who does not understand why they are even going on a date. There is more intentionality now, especially among Gen Z. Many are not interested in casual dating. If they go on a date, it is with someone they could genuinely imagine seeing again.

Jacobsen: That seems like a significant shift away from hookup culture.

Hathorn: Definitely. People are doing a lot more talking online before they meet in person. Things are more coordinated. They show up already knowing, "This is what I am looking for." Moreover, if that does not align with the other person, no problem—but at least it is clear.

That kind of honesty early on might seem intense for a first date, but it saves time. Asking, "Are we good together? Is there attraction? Are our goals aligned?"—that avoids confusion later.

Jacobsen: I feel like that kind of directness is common for people in their 30s and 40s.

Hathorn: Yes.

Jacobsen: Get to the point. But what about people in their early 20s? Is it different for them?

Hathorn: Surprisingly, no. Gen Z is straightforward. They know what they want, and they will tell you. They are not wasting time. It is refreshing.

Jacobsen: Thank you for your time today, Emma.

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The Widdowson Case: Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Institutional Censorship in Canadian Universities

2025/07/23

Academic freedom includes… Freedom to express one's opinion about the institution, its administration, and the system in which one works… Freedom from institutional censorship…

Post-secondary educational institutions serve the common good of society through searching for, and disseminating, knowledge and understanding and through fostering independent thinking and expression in academic staff and students… These ends cannot be achieved without academic freedom.

All academic staff must have the right to fulfil their functions without reprisal or repression by the institution, the state, or any other source… contracts which are silent on the matter of academic freedom do not entitle the employer to breach or threaten in any way the academic freedom of academic staff…

Academic staff must not be hindered or impeded in exercising their civil rights as individuals, including the right to contribute to social change through free expression of opinion on matters of public interest. Academic staff must not suffer any institutional penalties because of the exercise of such rights.

Canadian Association of University Teachers, "**Academic Freedom: CAUT Policy Statement**" (April 20, 2025)

Dr. Frances Widdowson earned an Honours BA and MA in political science from the University of Victoria and a PhD in political science from York University. She worked as a policy analyst in the Northwest Territories. She developed an interest in Indigenous culture in Canada and what she called Canada's "Indigenous industry."

Academic Tenure and the Rise of a Controversial Voice

She joined the Mount Royal University Department of Economics, Justice and Policy Studies in 2008, earning tenure in 2011. She taught courses in political science and comparative politics with focus on policy analysis. Her case represents a broader clash between evolving institutional norms of conduct tied to equity and academic freedom.

As with many universalist claimed values, the *praxis* is the real test, because these values clash in real life. The balance of values is tested in real-life cases, sometimes individual persons. The focus will be Dr. Widdowson and the case at Mount Royal University.

With a career as a policy analyst and tenured professor at Mount Royal University (c. 2011), Dr. Widdowson was critical of "woke" movements and Indigenous policy. She provided open critiques of Indigenous research paradigms. The most notable period was 2018. A Twitter (now X) dialogue, heated debate. This led to harassment complaints.

In February, 2018, she publicly questioned traditional Indigenous research methods at Mount Royal University. She made the argument: certain approaches prioritized funding over community needs. This drew strong criticism. Some labelled Dr. Widdowson with the epithet

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"racist." Columnist Barbara Kay defended Dr. Widdowson as an academic challenging accepted narratives about residential schools. Kay framed the critiques as probing rather than hateful.

The Twitter War and Institutional Fallout

Dr. Widdowson engaged in heated exchanges with colleagues during 2020. Mount Royal University labelled this the "Twitter War." Public disputes ranged from aspects of the Black Lives matter movement, e.g., Black Lives Matter "destroyed MRU," to more. In July, 2021, Dr. Widdowson filed a harassment complaint against a colleague's tweets. In November, 2021, an investigation claimed the complaint was "malicious, frivolous, vexatious, and made in bad faith." At the same time, Mount Royal University's probe concluded Dr. Widdowson's tweets constituted harassment. Mount Royal University dismissed Dr. Widdowson on December 20, 2021.

Mount Royal University President Tim Rahilly signed the termination letter for Dr. Widdowson. Nine satirical tweets and one complaint were cited as grounds for the violation of harassment and conduct codes. On that afternoon, after delivering an exam, Dr. Widdowson was requested by human resources. She was informed. Her employment was terminated effective immediately (then). She recalls the experience as procedurally opaque and distressing.

Arbitration, Aftermath, and the Future of Academic Freedom

Dr. Widdowson received a termination letter. 30 hearing days occurred over ten months between January 27th, 2023 and November, 2023. Eventually, it was 30 hearing days with 25 witnesses. These hearings scrutinized fairness of procedures, i.e., collective agreement compliance as well as the basis for dismissal, i.e., academic expression versus policy violations.

Arbitrator David Phillip Jones ruled on July 2, 2024: Widdowson's tweets warranted discipline ("just cause"), while the firing was "disproportionate to her actions." No compelling evidence was found that the conduct posed an irreparable threat to the academic environment. A letter of reprimand was substituted for the two-week suspension, but reinstatement was deemed non-viable because of the significant breakdown in professional relationships. A monetary remedy was awarded *in lieu* of reinstatement. Dr. Widdowson has expressed satisfaction at acknowledgement of wrongful dismissal. She continues to challenge aspects of the harassment findings and continues in advocacy for academic freedom.

Some might see the wrongful dismissal as evidence of tenure as *not* immunizing from consequences for harassing behaviour. Others may contend the dismissal represents a threat to contentious topic debate and dialogue, even heated. Dr. Widdowson has given lectures on "woke-ism." She continues to appeal for reinstatement and persists in litigation.

The case study in academic freedom is ongoing.

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How Emma Hathorn Navigates Modern Dating: Age Gaps, Cultural Sensitivity, and Intentional Love

2025/07/24

Emma Hathorn is a Dating Expert at Seeking.com, specializing in online dating, luxury relationships, and modern dating trends. She offers insights on age-gap dynamics, dating safety, and emotional connection. Frequently featured in major media outlets, she helps singles navigate relationships with clarity, confidence, and elevated standards. She discusses modern dating, exploring cultural sensitivity, emotional intent, and shifting social expectations. Hathorn shares a Zora Neale Hurston quote to illustrate love's adaptability, emphasizing self-awareness, mutual respect, and meaningful connection over superficial judgments, despite changing norms around age, gender roles, and long-term commitment.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is your favourite dating quote?

Emma Hathorn: I do have a quote. It's not specifically about dating—it's about love in general—but I think it applies.

Jacobsen: Who defines what makes a good date? Is it the person with long-term goals who spends two hours getting ready, or the person who shows up casually? What quote would you say characterizes a good first date for someone genuinely looking for love?

Hathorn: The quote is broader, but here it is: Zora Neale Hurston once wrote, "Love is like the sea. It's a moving thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from every shore it meets." It changes with every new shore.

Jacobsen: That's a poetic and insightful quote.

Hathorn: I love Zora. I think it's important to approach dating knowing that not every experience will lead to something long-term, but each person brings something valuable. You're meant to learn something from every connection.

Jacobsen: What about dates where there seems to be nothing to learn?

Hathorn: Don't go on those. You shouldn't. You have to know what you're looking for and what you want. You need to be intentional before even agreeing to meet.

Jacobsen: How do you make the date planning and screening process culturally appropriate? Japan is very different from South Africa, which is different from Canada or Iceland.

Hathorn: That's so true. You have to be open-minded, make sure there's mutual respect, and that you can communicate clearly beforehand. Cultural sensitivity starts before the first date—it's about curiosity and consideration.

Someone has to be able to speak at least some of the language the other person speaks—otherwise, the conversation will be limited. But I think that also comes in the pre-planning. Make sure you have a good rapport over text, have a quick phone call, and see if there's a spark—something that makes you want to talk to them more.

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Culturally, dating across backgrounds can be really challenging, but it's also incredibly rewarding if you approach it with humility. You'll never know everything, but you can learn a lot. You'll likely walk away with more than you brought to the experience.

Jacobsen: Why are some people so risk-averse that they do not even try to go on a date—even if they want to? They see some bad news story or binge a British crime drama and say, "You know what? No."

Hathorn: Well, fortune favors the bold. People tend to be more successful when they step outside their comfort zone. That said, I have mixed views about staying in one's comfort zone. I do not think there is much value in being deeply uncomfortable in a dating scenario—unless it's part of natural growth. Some personalities throw themselves into new situations without fear, and I think that's admirable.

Jacobsen: Like docu-comedies such as *Jackass*—they're built around that idea.

Hathorn: Then you have people who just do not want to leave the house—it happens. Online dating can really help in that case. If someone has anxiety around dating, they can start building rapport online. Share hobbies, have conversations—it makes meeting in person much less intimidating. You also arrive with shared interests and conversation topics—you're more prepared.

Jacobsen: Often there are sensationalized, *Daily Mail*-style headlines about dating. It gets attention because dating is something almost everyone does. Everyone has been on a bad date. Most people have had average or good dates. But the media loves overblown stories. I say this as a journalist—there's often a press motive here.

We see headlines like "Two-thirds of men under 30 aren't dating," or something to that effect. The data may be technically accurate, but it's often framed in a way that fuels panic. Some women date women more frequently now, so that shifts the dating pool. Similarly, men may be dating men. Among younger adults, the gender split in dating is complex.

Could the loosening of age-based screening criteria be part of the story? Are we seeing a change that is being misinterpreted or overhyped in the media just to drive clicks?

Hathorn: Absolutely. That leads to the broader age gap conversation. People today are much more flexible about age than they were in the past—especially women, who are more open to dating older men.

It's becoming less about the number and more about the individual and the connection. Expanding your criteria—whether that's age, culture, or anything else—can only help. If you're genuinely interested in meeting people, welcoming diversity is a really positive mindset to have.

I've noticed that people are going on fewer dates, but they're approaching them more seriously. I think many are tired of frivolity in dating. There's a lot of disillusionment, especially from swipe culture. People are exhausted—it's become so shallow and appearance-based. It's a quick judgment: "No, not for me."

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It's depressing. The process becomes about instant gratification—getting swiped on gives you a small serotonin hit. But I think more people are now turning away from that and trying to find something meaningful, something beyond feeding the algorithm.

Jacobsen: Is the issue internal, like within the dating rituals or age gap dynamics? Or is it more about the person—something more fundamental than age?

Hathorn: I think there's definitely social pressure to date within your own age group. That judgment disproportionately falls on women. For example, if a woman dates someone 30 years older, people react harshly without considering the actual connection between the individuals.

We overlook the fact that someone at 25 might have lived in several countries and accumulated a wealth of experience. They may have more in common with an older partner who's done similar things over a longer timeline.

Jacobsen: Right—like the children of diplomats or ambassadors.

Hathorn: Exactly. They've lived all over the world, and when they choose to date someone older, it often makes sense based on shared experiences.

Jacobsen: When it comes to mating, dating, or having children, that's one realm. But marriage—historically and even today—has often functioned as an economic arrangement. For centuries, and particularly for women, marriage was tied to being considered property. That's still true in some parts of the world. In earlier periods, property didn't just mean land or goods—it extended to people. Over time, subjectivity became recognized—eventually tied to voting rights and personal agency.

Fundamentally, marriage has always had an economic and social dimension. It was, and often still is, about structuring social strata. In British society, for instance, marriage has long carried that function. In India, it may be framed more cosmically or karmically, especially under the caste system. But regardless of how it's expressed—spiritual or secular—the economic base is often still there.

Jacobsen: I think what we are seeing is that as the economic system changes—definitions of "breadwinner" and what qualifies as a job—social structures like marriage and family are evolving too. Our genetics have not changed, but the framework around us has. As the frame changes, the arrangements shift accordingly.

It is different from declaring a crisis, like "the crisis of men" or "the crisis of single women." That kind of language exaggerates things. How do you see people adapting their perspectives as the very definition of marriage and the family unit shifts along with these economic and social changes?

Hathorn: Yes, absolutely. There is much more equality now. From the context of *Seeking*, we often talk about *hypergamy*, which has historical roots in India. Traditionally, it referred to marrying up in social or economic status, often gendered.

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What's interesting today is that gender is being taken out of that model. A hypergamous relationship in a modern sense is about both partners bringing different strengths and supporting each other—emotionally, economically, intellectually.

The shift in social and economic roles—especially between men and women—has created opportunities for people to connect in ways that go far beyond economics. One partner might be the breadwinner while the other contributes emotional stability, creative energy, or household organization.

Jacobsen: Or even seasonally—it could shift over time.

Hathorn: That kind of flexibility is important. One might provide financially while the other offers emotional grounding, curiosity, and new ideas. It becomes a dynamic balance.

This shift allows people to explore healthier, more equitable relationship dynamics. In the past, gender roles were rigid—men worked outside, women stayed at home. Now, we see relationships forming between whole human beings rather than rigid gendered archetypes. That gives me some hope for the future.

Jacobsen: Are people thinking about these dynamics even before a first date? It seems like there's a lot of weight attached to the experience—almost to the point that it creates anxiety. Do you think people bring this psychological burden into first dates, making it harder to connect authentically in the moment?

Hathorn: I think it's something people carry with them, but ideally, it should remain in the background—not dominate the date. We are all conscious of our place within the broader social dynamic. Women especially have always been attuned to this, not just in passing but as a constant awareness.

However, there's also freedom in that awareness. You're entering a date as a full person—not necessarily looking for someone to financially support you, but for someone who complements you emotionally. That sense of balance and mutual support is key. Still, it depends on the couple. Each dynamic is unique, and what works for one may not work for another.

This isn't something we should overthink during a date. You need to go in with a free spirit and an open mind—just see who you're meeting. People are complex.

That said, I do think most people have this kind of background consideration, even if they're not fully conscious of it: *What do I bring to the table? What do I hope my partner brings?* It's healthy to acknowledge that.

It also helps to know yourself well—what you want long term, and even just what you want out of the date itself. Being deeply self-aware usually leads to a better experience.

Jacobsen: How should people negotiate the place, time, and location of a first date?

Hathorn: That should be straightforward—just based on mutual preferences. What do you enjoy doing? Where do you like to go? Everyone has their favorite spots. It's something worth discussing beforehand: *What's your ideal date? Where do you like to go?*

Jacobsen: Let's try that out.

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Hathorn: Exactly! It's a fun conversation starter. Ask: *What would be your dream date?* Then work from there. You want to avoid awkward or unpleasant places, and you want to make sure the person you're inviting is going to have a great time.

Jacobsen: That's a whole other topic—just bad dates.

Hathorn: Yes, exactly.

Jacobsen: Like something out of a reality TV show.

Hathorn: Right—dragging someone around a shopping mall or to an anime convention on day one.

Jacobsen: Japan might love that.

Hathorn: Personally, I'd love that—but still!

Jacobsen: Do you find there are any cross-cultural "nos"? Things that generally do not go over well on a first date—either in a specific culture or broadly?

Hathorn: I can only speak from personal experience—Japan and South Africa, since I've lived in both.

Jacobsen: That's actually a good range: one largely homogeneous, the other more diverse.

Hathorn: In Japan, for instance, you need to be more polite than you might expect. You cannot be too forward in public—it's just not done. You really have to be hyper-aware of the cultural context, especially when you're outside your own culture. Be respectful and polite—"when in Rome," as they say. Try to take the cues.

It helps to learn a little beforehand. You're going to miss small cultural cues—that's inevitable—but it's better to mess up with genuine intent than not to care at all. Sometimes, those little mistakes can even become a great conversation point: *"Oh, you're not supposed to do that here."*

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Modern Dating: More Intentional While Long-Term Commitments Decline

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Emma Hathorn is a Dating Expert at Seeking.com, specializing in online dating, luxury relationships, and modern dating trends. She offers insights on age-gap dynamics, dating safety, and emotional connection. Frequently featured in major media outlets, she helps singles navigate relationships with clarity, confidence, and elevated standards. Hathorn discusses modern dating trends, including increased intentionality, declining marriage rates, and evolving relationship norms. They explore emotional hope, societal pressures, the timing of physical intimacy, and learning from failed dates. Hathorn emphasizes personal happiness, authenticity, and adaptability as keys to navigating today's complex dating landscape with confidence and grace.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Do you feel that people are more intentional about dating now? That it has become more of an "event"? At the same time, long-term institutionalized relationships like marriage are declining. Do you think people are looking for some middle ground—like dating for five years and then opting for a renewal instead of a lifelong commitment?

Emma Hathorn: I do not know. I think people still go in with hope—that there is a soulmate connection waiting out there for them. Even though we are quite jaded and overexposed to media and dating culture, there is still a deep-rooted hope.

From what I have seen—especially through *Seeking*—that hope is real. Seeking has rebranded, and it's interesting because the founder met his wife through the platform. They got married, and he waived his right to a divorce. They're married permanently now.

Jacobsen: That's powerful. He eliminated his exit strategy.

Hathorn: I love that there's still romance in the idea of forever. I love that hope—*what if this is the right person?* What if you can grow together and adapt to life's many changes? And I think that's the dream.

Jacobsen: So, you can kind of grow old and die together like *The Notebook*.

Hathorn: Yes, that's how it should be.

Jacobsen: Isn't that the ideal? Although *The Notebook* felt like it had half a dozen different endings.

Hathorn: Wait, which one?

Jacobsen: *The Notebook*. It kept trying to end—just pick one!

Hathorn: Stop breaking up the emotional momentum.

Jacobsen: It was a good movie, but seriously—I wasn't asking the woman what she wanted; I was asking the film: *What do you want?* What were you doing, movie?

Hathorn: I think because we're constantly exposed to overwhelming media, especially online—so much negativity, so much noise—it's comforting to believe that something good is still

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possible. That maybe there's someone who complements you perfectly. I think people still go into online dating with that hope, and that's what makes it exciting.

Jacobsen: What's your favourite part about giving relationship advice?

Hathorn: Honestly, I just love talking to people. I'm naturally curious. I've always been fascinated by relationships. How people connect is endlessly interesting to me.

Jacobsen: What about people who face external judgment? Say their family or society disapproves of who they're dating—whether it's due to religion, politics, ethnicity, age gap, education, or finances. How do people navigate those social or cultural barriers?

Hathorn: That's one of the hardest situations to navigate. You can't live your life for other people. No matter how much you care about them—even if they believe they have your best interests at heart—they're projecting their values onto you. At some point, you have to prioritize your happiness.

Unfortunately, there aren't always structures in place to protect individuals who deviate from those expectations, and many suffer as a result. Some even avoid pursuing a relationship and end up questioning what might have been. That decision—whether to take the risk—can only be made by the individual in that context.

Even in something as simple as an age gap relationship, women hear things like, *"He's far too old for you"* or *"You'recrazy."* But if you connect with someone, that's what matters. It is your decision.

It's a society that's shaping the perception of that person—and of you for being with them. But ultimately, you should choose yourself. That takes courage. The same goes for queer relationships, which are still heavily stigmatized in many places.

There's not always a clear path forward. You either go for it, or you don't. You could keep it a secret, but that usually ends up causing more harm than good.

Jacobsen: I think that's why American gay men tend to be often so self-assured.

Hathorn: Yes, because they had to fight for it. They've claimed it.

Jacobsen: I am not an expert in this, but let's say someone goes into a date with the kind of intentionality we've been discussing. The date goes well—they're both attracted, there's chemistry—and they go back to one of their places. Things escalate. Should that be a consideration if someone's looking for a long-term connection?

In other words, if someone has a conscious path toward commitment or something serious, should physical intimacy on the first date be seen as a barrier? There's so much advice out there —"Make them wait 90 days," or "Don't have sex until…"—but rarely any rationale behind it.

Hathorn: Ah, I see. Yes—about whether people should "wait."

Jacobsen: Should people follow that advice? Or is there any real basis for it? How should someone navigate that moment if they feel a strong connection and are also looking for something long-term?

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Hathorn: I don't believe there's a one-size-fits-all answer to that. It depends on the connection. If things unfold naturally and both people are on the same page—why not follow that energy and see where it goes? Sometimes, people do connect quickly, and the chemistry is undeniable.

Don't deny yourself an experience just because of some arbitrary rule like "start fast, end fast." That's not universally true. It depends on the connection, the communication, and the mutual respect between two adults.

I am not saying "love at first sight" is always real, but powerful connections can absolutely happen on a first date—and sometimes they include physical intimacy. Flexibility and open communication are essential. Make sure it aligns with both of your boundaries. You're adults—you should be able to decide that without imposed timelines.

Jacobsen: What's another great quote you like?

Hathorn: I only have the one I already shared—that's my favourite.

Jacobsen: Just one? That's like a very sparse fridge.

Hathorn: There's a Japanese word that comes to mind—one that's often used in dating: *shogunate*. It means "let it be" or "it can't be helped." It's like saying, "Shake it off."

Jacobsen: Like Taylor Swift—*Shake it off*.

Hathorn: That's a helpful mindset to bring into dating. If you have a bad date, just go, "Ah well, it happens."

Jacobsen: It's not a reflection on you, not necessarily on them.

Hathorn: Precisely. It's going to happen.

Jacobsen: The crazy thing is—it's not necessarily anyone's fault. It's a good lesson. There's always something to take from a bad date. But we should not be overly optimistic and pretend a bad date is not unpleasant—it often is, by definition.

Hathorn: A bad date is just that—a bad date.

Jacobsen: Like a bad day. It is kind of "cringe-light."

Hathorn: Yes! Cringe light is the perfect way to put it. But you know what? It tells you exactly what you do not want. You walk away thinking, *"Okay, I'm never going to say that again,"* and you aim to do better next time.

Jacobsen: That's a really good insight—it tells you what you do not want. So even a bad date can be educational.

Hathorn: Sometimes, the thing that made it a bad date was something you originally thought you *did* want. But then you experience it in context and realize, *"Actually, this doesn't work for me. That felt off."*

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Emma.

Hathorn: Thank you so much. It was so nice meeting you—it was such a good conversation.

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Authenticity and Vulnerability on First Dates: Caroline Geraghty Shares Her CORE Method for Meaningful Connection

2025/07/30

Part 1 of 2

Caroline Geraghty, Internal Account Manager at 110 North Creative Agency, shares insights on authenticity and connection in dating. Drawing from her experience and her CORE method—Center, Observe, Reflect, Express—she emphasizes the importance of grounding oneself, embracing vulnerability, and managing anxiety with self-awareness. She explains how nervousness can stem from excitement, not a lack of chemistry, and offers strategies to create meaningful dialogue and build trust. Geraghty advocates for honest communication, extending grace to oneself and others, and staying curious during first dates to foster genuine connection. Her perspective blends personal insight with compassionate, practical advice for modern relationships.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So today, we're here with Caroline Geraghty. She's an Internal Account Manager at 110 North Creative Agency. She previously served as a Client Account Manager from September 2023 to February 2025. Her professional background includes roles in marketing, community engagement, and health care—such as Marketing Specialist at The Karate Group and staff positions at UMC ([clarify: full name of UMC]). Caroline has also been involved in community initiatives, including serving as Block Party Co-Chair for the Bradley Gardens PTO and as Vice President of Hey Girl, You Can.

Her diverse experience reflects a strong commitment to integrating strategic communication with community and healthcare insights.

Thank you so much for joining me today. So, what do you think are common barriers to authenticity that people face on first dates?

Caroline Geraghty: A lot of it has to do with self-confidence. You're putting yourself in a vulnerable position by opening up to someone completely new—someone you may or may not have had the chance to get to know. And at any point when you're trying to make a connection with someone, we often start going through this internal checklist—or audit—asking: *Am I good enough? Will this person like who I am when we first meet? Have I represented myself authentically sufficient to meet this person's expectations?*

What ends up happening is that the part of your brain responsible for fight, flight, freeze, or fawn—the amygdala—kicks in. It's there to protect you. But for people who don't know how to ground or center themselves, that response can hijack the prefrontal cortex—the part of the brain responsible for reasoning and executive function.

Sorry, I'm a little nervous—this is the first time I've done something like this in a long time.

So even now, in this example, right? This is our first time meeting. I haven't interviewed in a while, so I prepped myself. I did a bit of centring. What it comes down to is this: it starts with yourself.

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Finding the space and time to ground yourself in who you are and what you bring to the table is such an essential first step—especially when it comes to first dates.

Jacobsen: What is the CORE method?

Geraghty: CORE is something I developed during my journey of discovering my neurodivergence. I've realized, through conversations with friends, therapists, mental health advocates, and providers, that my brain works a little differently.

One thing I've noticed is that not everyone naturally runs through a checklist of *how to be human* —and I know that might sound silly. However, for individuals who struggle with social interactions or have brains that function differently, maintaining a running list is a powerful tool. It helps you show up as your whole, authentic self in situations that are often nerve-wracking or might otherwise prevent you from building the meaningful connections that are so important to every human being.

So for me, what I've noticed—again, going back to "C is for Center"—is the importance of grounding yourself in who you are and checking in with your body. That means acknowledging and calling out the experiences you're having in real-time. Right now, I'm feeling nervous. I'm feeling a little less confident than I was when I initially responded to your request.

But acknowledging that is part of the human experience. This is an opportunity for me to share my story, to get to know a new person—you, Scott—and to learn more about what you're doing.

So, "O" is for Observe. That means paying attention to what exactly is happening with those feelings and understanding their origin. For instance, I mentioned earlier that it has been a long time since I last did an interview. Reopening myself to these situations and opportunities brings a learning curve—but hopefully, like riding a bike, I can find my groove, enjoy it, and gradually build up my confidence in this space.

Then we move into Reflecting. Acknowledging that being nervous or not feeling entirely confident isn't a bad thing—it's an opportunity for growth, development, and stretching beyond my comfort zone. Ideally, that leads to something even greater.

And finally, Express. This means being able to openly and effectively share your communication experience. Not only being able to ask for what you need in a given situation but also speaking authentically about your lived experience. That authenticity creates a connection—between you and me and with anyone reading or listening in the future.

Jacobsen: How does vulnerability contribute to building a genuine connection early on?

Geraghty: There are parts of your brain that support this. When you're vulnerable, your body releases oxytocin—not only in you but also in the person you're interacting with. It lowers defences. Essentially, you're showing a moment of weakness or openness, and in that shared space, the other person may feel safe to open up as well.

They might share something personal or acknowledge that you're just another human being navigating life. Vulnerability can create common ground or invite a deeper conversation—

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something the other person might feel strongly about or a moment where they choose to be more vulnerable themselves.

Jacobsen: How do you balance being authentic while managing nerves—especially in that early-stage context like a first date?

Geraghty: Taking a deep breath helps. And again, remind yourself that people aren't looking for perfection—especially on a first date.

It's unrealistic to show up as your most polished self every day. So, starting by saying, "Hey, this is who I am. I'm human. I have flaws. I have vulnerabilities—and I'm okay with that," shows the person that you're also okay with *their vulnerable* moments. You're the type of partner, connection, or community who can support them when they're not at their strongest—someone who can hold space when they need to be seen and heard.

Jacobsen: How do you distinguish between lack of chemistry and first-date anxiety? Because people might conflate those at the moment. If someone is feeling anxious during a first date, they might mistake that anxiety for a lack of chemistry. And those aren't necessarily the same thing. They *could* be, depending on the person—but they often aren't. So, how do you tell the difference in the moment?

Geraghty: That's a great question. At the moment, if you're feeling anxious, one way to distinguish between the two is to shift your mindset. Center yourself and recognize: *Yes, I'm feeling anxiety.* Then, reflect on what that anxiety is about.

The reason behind that anxiety might be that you're excited to meet this person. And—reflecting on observing—it's essential to realize you're going to fumble your words or say something that might not land exactly how you intended.

But that's how authentic conversations go. This isn't a podcast. This isn't a job interview. It's an opportunity to have a dialogue, to go back and forth, and to leave space—not only for yourself to share more but to learn more about the person you're with. It's about being curious about them.

Ultimately, it's about being able to express yourself in a more effective and meaningful way—so that connection can be built.

For the person who recognizes that their date is probably experiencing some anxiety, you can open the door for vulnerability by saying something like, "Hey, first dates—jitters, right?" or, "I'm excited and feeling nervous too." By doing that, you're acknowledging that this is a shared human experience, not something that only the other person is going through. You're naming it for yourself as well.

Also, offering your date grace if you notice signs of anxiety matters. Pay attention—are they fidgeting? Do they seem disengaged from where the conversation is going? Notice their body language and see if there's a way to shift the energy. Consider suggesting a walk or changing the topic to something lighter and more engaging.

There are ways to break through that anxiety and hopefully uncover the chemistry beneath it.

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How AI Is Reshaping Gen Z Careers: Insights from Entrepreneur Jared Navarre

2025/07/30

Jared Navarre, a multidisciplinary entrepreneur and creative strategist, explores how AI is transforming career paths for Gen Z, especially those pursuing nontraditional or unstable roles. With deep experience consulting for over 250 businesses and launching ventures across industries, Navarre explains that AI is rapidly replacing many traditional roles—from dispatching to graphic design—demanding that young professionals become strategic tool users. While AI democratizes intelligence, it also elevates the need for critical thinking, subject-matter expertise, and adaptability. The value now lies in directing AI effectively and maintaining creative and analytical depth in a quickly evolving workforce.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So, today, we're here with Jared Navarre. He's a multidisciplinary entrepreneur and creative strategist based in Anchorage, Alaska, with experience spanning the IT, logistics, entertainment, and service sectors.

He has successfully launched, scaled, and exited multiple ventures. As a consultant to over 250 businesses, Jared specializes in operational systems, technology infrastructure, and brand ecosystem development. He is the visionary behind ZILLION—an immersive music project that integrates storytelling, multimedia, and live performance—transforming artistic ideas into monetizable intellectual property. He is positioning ZILLION for cross-platform expansion across music, animation, comics, and augmented reality.

So, how is AI changing careers for Gen Z, particularly those looking to pursue less traditional or more unstable career paths? For the last five to ten years, we've been hearing that people are increasingly unlikely to stay in a single job or career from college to retirement.

People will be shifting roles frequently. So, how is this landscape changing, and how is it impacting the group that's entering the job market?

Jared Navarre: First of all, I love the topic. Futurists have been predicting these shifts for decades. There's a quote I've adapted over the years

"The future will be divided into two groups—those giving instructions to machines, and those taking instructions from them."

In my opinion, and based on what I've seen across my companies, Gen Z is the generation that will be most affected by AI. I'll share a few stories—both from recent consulting projects and from my businesses.

Many professions are not just in limbo—they're being actively replaced. I've seen individuals spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on degrees in fields like graphic design, marketing, legal research, journalism, and even contract law—only to see those roles downsized or automated. In some cases, even the companies I advise or those I work with have had to make those difficult decisions.

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When I think of Gen Z, I break it into two groups. The younger Gen Zs—say, those still in school—have a potential opportunity to pivot early. They might even help shape how AI is implemented and maybe even contribute to building the next generation of tools. But even they have a narrow window, and by the time many are making career decisions, these shifts may have already solidified.

That said, people who are adaptable and strategic will always find ways to add value. That's been true throughout history. But yes—if it helps, I can give a few specific examples from my businesses and some larger organizations I've consulted for.

Jacobsen: Sure, let's do it. You've got 250 examples to choose from!

Navarre: Yeah—we stopped keeping track a few years ago, but once we passed the 250 mark, we just focused on quality and depth. One interesting example is from a company I still own—it's a plumbing and heating business…

And on the dispatching side, multiple companies are racing toward the finish line—and this is already happening across call centers throughout the U.S. Dispatching is especially interesting because each trade, profession, and craft has unique nuances. I've consulted for a wide range of service-based businesses.

Take plumbing and heating, specifically. We're currently in the process of deploying automated dispatching and scheduling systems. As we've populated and refined the AI model, it now has better decision-making capabilities than many of our seasoned dispatchers.

We've been able to train the model using master-level plumber knowledge and institutional expertise unique to that company. This business operates exclusively in Alaska, which, as you can imagine, presents particular challenges. In Alaska, "no heat" is a real emergency—when it's -30°F, and someone loses heat, it can be life-threatening.

That's one fascinating use case. Another involved a major shoe company—a household name. We conducted a three-week AI exploration project for them, and by the end, unfortunately, they let go of ten staff members. Nine of them were Gen Z. The impacted roles included graphic designers and marketers, as the AI tools we implemented were significantly faster and more effective by comparison.

Jacobsen: That's brutal. So, what does this mean in terms of upskilling and acquiring knowledge? Is traditional knowledge becoming less of a leverage point and more about how well someone uses tools that can instantly provide or apply knowledge?

Navarre: Are you asking from an employee's perspective—from a human worker's point of view?

Jacobsen: Is the path forward going to revolve more around an individual's ability to work effectively with AI tools?

Navarre: Yes, I see what you're getting at. It depends on the application.

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Take, for example, the traditional workflow: something breaks in your house. You make a few phone calls, talk to a human dispatcher who coordinates with another human, check availability, schedule a technician, and so on—eventually, someone shows up to fix the issue.

With automation in place, especially in home services businesses, we've eliminated up to three human roles in that entire process.

So yes, it does depend on the context. But to answer your question more directly, when we're responding to an RFI or RFP—whether it's from a large company or a government contract—from the consulting side, the human value increasingly comes down to how effectively someone can manage and deploy these tools.

I typically have to estimate between thirty and two hundred person-hours to bid on a job, okay? And that applies whether I'm doing it myself or a large company is bidding—whether it's for BP, Conoco, or any central entity. There's a significant amount of labour and detail that goes into preparing those proposals.

But the last contract proposal I put together—for a city project—I completed it myself using Jasper without any assistance from my team. It took me forty-five minutes, pricing and everything included.

So, to your earlier question: yes. You have to be able to use these tools. That is non-negotiable now. But I also think, in the end, intelligence—real cognitive ability—is still going to win.

If you still bring something valuable to the table—strategic thinking, adaptability, creativity—you will navigate through the changes. High-IQ individuals will continue to rise, even as these systems become increasingly analytically advanced.

Jacobsen: These systems are already more analytically alert than we are. They may not yet fully replicate emotional nuance or lived experience, but this democratization of intelligence—what does that do to how we define business and work, especially for the upcoming generation? Could you clarify your perspective on that?

Historically, someone's skills, knowledge, and cognitive abilities—as well as soft skills—have been the key benchmarks for accessing specific industries, working with certain firms, or building particular kinds of businesses over time.

Now, with these AIs and algorithms—tools that are becoming more intelligent every month—the barrier to entry is lower. These tools can do high-level analytical work. All people need is the ability to frame a good prompt.

That's a significant shift: it democratizes access to cognitive and strategic output. So, if something that once took 200 hours can now take 45 minutes, what does that mean for our concept of work from both a business and a worker perspective?

Navarre: That's a great question. And I think we've already seen a version of this before—with the democratization of information through the Internet. There were many assumptions made about what that would lead to—most of them incorrect.

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I think we're now approaching a similar inflection point with AI. To provide some broader context, I serve as chairman of a couple of NGOs that run projects in places such as Burma, Thailand, and the Philippines—even in areas where we engage with communities affected by cartel violence in Mexico. These are some of the most remote and underserved places on the planet.

And even in those regions, we're now seeing meaningful access to the Internet. The infrastructure is catching up. So, if access to information became nearly universal in the past decade, we're now on the brink of something similar with intelligence—the ability to act on that information at scale.

Sadly, it's still taking far too long for some of those areas to gain access, which is ridiculous. That being said, based on what I've seen across all of my companies—and specifically, if we're staying focused on Gen Z—a lot of these AI models are still being trained and populated by humans.

Even when people use the tools, I've seen more incorrect work products in the last three to six months than at any other point in my career. You still need a deep enough knowledge base to sort through and assess what is accurate, what is viable, and what constitutes a good work product. The number of times these models—I won't call any of them out individually—have generated incorrect outputs is unsettling.

For example, if I'm preparing for an interview with you and I know nothing about the topic, I can surface a bunch of information quickly. But that does not mean I can speak about it with any depth or authority.

That's changed how I hire across all of my companies. Now, I prioritize individuals with in-depth institutional knowledge and genuine subject-matter expertise over those who are merely skilled at navigating AI tools. That's where the real value lies.

I wouldn't say raw IQ is everything, but deep expertise and cognitive sharpness still matter. They're the foundation for adapting—and thriving—as AI accelerates.

At the same time, perseverance is another major factor—it can even outperform IQ in some cases.

Some Gen Z professionals who were laid off by Fortune 50 companies three or four years ago—people who had spent the last decade, including their teens, mastering skills like graphic design—have come back to me after retooling and relearning how to bring value to the same space.

Please take one of my companies: I used to have six full-time graphic and web designers. I'm down to one. And the reason that one person remains is because they have an eye for design. That's it. Their job is now to direct the AI tools—they guide the machine by telling it exactly what to do, but the creative judgment still comes from them.

That's powerful. And I appreciate that—today is our first formal meeting, but I did a lot of prep to understand who you are and where you're coming from. You seem to have a strong voice, and ironically, that kind of presence may be more critical than ever in your profession.

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People like that are only going to become more valuable. And the truth is, I don't know how you replicate that—how you bottle it—outside of years and years of deep, focused learning and immersion. There's no shortcut to that.

Jacobsen: What about educational institutions and creative development programs? How can they adapt to remain valuable in this rapidly evolving landscape?

Navarre: These guys are now generating bids with significantly more accuracy, to be honest, because they're leveraging historical job costing data—looking at what they estimated for labour versus what it cost and what their margin ended up being on comparable projects.

They're also submitting around 40 times the number of bids they used to. And beyond that, they're using AI to scale their workforce dynamically. The entire recruitment pipeline—from sourcing to onboarding—is partially automated.

So when I talk about this window of opportunity, I mean there's a real chance for individuals and companies to generate massive value—financial and otherwise—*if* they leverage these tools effectively now. But that window is shrinking every single day.

The same goes for your world. If it's a race to generate quality content at scale, and it's you versus someone else who's using the right tools—then, honestly, the one not leveraging them is at a serious disadvantage.

Jacobsen: What are the sincere risks we should be keeping in mind, even while we enjoy the benefits of these technologies—particularly among younger generations, who are often the most fluent in using them?

Navarre: Man, that's a great question. I think *accuracy* and *sourcing*—I don't know if anything is more important than those two things right now. Then there's the importance of keeping intelligent humans around you. And still, find ways to engage your critical thinking mechanisms actively. That can look different for everyone, but it's essential.

One of the saddest things I've seen, and a reason I've had to let people go, is that they stopped thinking critically. They relied too heavily on AI tools and just went through the motions. No more analysis. No more depth.

Please—don't lose sight of the value of the human brain. Applied with depth and intention, it still outperforms the smartest tools. Keep thinking critically. That's your edge.

Jacobsen: Absolutely. Thank you for your time today. I appreciate it—and thank you for your insight and expertise.

Navarre: Hey, man, I appreciate it. Seriously—your work is excellent. You're incredibly talented. It's been a pleasure to be here today. Hopefully, we'll talk again.

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Authenticity, Intuition, and International Love: Stephen Frost on Building Cross-Cultural Marriages in Japan

2025/07/30

Part 1 of 2

Stephen Frost, founder of *Marriage Matching* in Osaka, Japan, shares his expertise on international matchmaking rooted in authenticity, self-awareness, and psychological insight. Frost discusses how self-esteem and unconscious processing shape dating dynamics, why gut instinct and shared values matter more than surface traits, and how structured introductions like *omiai* foster genuine connection. Drawing from real-world experience, he explores the psychology of compatibility, the dangers of inauthentic behavior, and how open, respectful communication enables long-term relationship success—especially across cultures. The interview offers a practical, thoughtful roadmap to finding love in a globalized world.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Stephen Frost is the founder and director of *Marriage Matching*, an international marriage matching agency based in Osaka, Japan. As a certified NLP coach with over twenty years of experience, he has helped individuals across the globe find meaningful, lasting relationships—especially in the context of intercultural and international marriages. Through his agency, Stephen combines personalized coaching, cultural awareness, and psychological insight to help clients meet compatible partners and build fulfilling partnerships. His areas of expertise include dating psychology, relationship coaching, and cross-cultural communication, which enable him to guide clients through the unique challenges of international matchmaking.

Passionate about fostering genuine connections, Stephen has empowered countless clients to better understand themselves and approach relationships with confidence, clarity, and authenticity.

Thank you for joining me today. What are some common mistakes people make when trying to impress someone on a first date, instead of just being themselves?

Stephen Frost: One of the most common mistakes people make is assuming they know what the other person wants. It may sound strange, but it's incredibly common.

What this really comes down to is self-esteem. Many people are uncomfortable with who they truly are, so they present a version of themselves they think will be more appealing—rather than being genuine.

A large part of what we do as a marriage agency here in Japan involves building detailed and accurate profiles for our clients. We conduct multiple consultations to develop a deep understanding of each individual. There's a cross-checking process where we revisit key points to ensure consistency and accuracy. We also create psychological profiles to better understand each person's values, communication style, and long-term goals.

So, when we create these final profiles, they tend to be quite accurate. Of course, occasionally something doesn't surface during interviews, but that's rare given the depth of the process.

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What often happens is that a client will read another person's profile and feel excited, but then start thinking, "I need to be someone better for this person to like me," even though the other person has already expressed interest in meeting them. That mindset leads people to perform or posture, rather than showing up as themselves.

And this is where self-esteem and self-acceptance come in. In Japan, these formal introductions are known as omiai, which are structured meetings specifically for people looking to marry. The omiai that go best are those where both people relax and simply allow their true selves to come through. When people try to impress rather than connect, they often get nervous—and that creates distance. Authenticity, not performance, is what leads to real connection.

And it's kind of natural, in a way, to think, *Okay, I like this person—are they going to like me?* That anxiety can lead someone to get overly nervous and start presenting themselves as someone they are not. That's where the trouble starts.

Jacobsen: So what does this mean in terms of the space people create during that kind of interaction?

People typically enter these situations in one of four ways, if we use a simplified model:

1. Both people are authentic.
2. Both people are inauthentic.
3. One person is authentic, and the other is not.
4. The reverse of that.

How do those dynamics shape the context once the interaction is underway—say, half an hour or an hour and a half into it? That's roughly the typical duration, correct?

Frost: Realistically, the only way to reach a solid, effective result is when both individuals are authentic. Now, following an authentic exchange, the outcome could go in a few directions. They might both feel a connection and choose to continue seeing each other, which can lead to a solid relationship. Or one of them may feel it was pleasant but not quite right, and opt not to pursue it further. Or both might mutually agree that while it was a good experience, it simply was not the right fit.

However, when one person is being inauthentic—or worse, both are—the chances of forming a sustainable relationship drop to zero. At some point, the inauthentic person cannot maintain the act anymore. They revert to their natural character, and that can result in a disorienting moment for the other person, who may think, *Who is this?* Or it can result in an emotional breakdown from the individual who has been pretending.

We had one such case over the many years we've been doing this. It was a gentleman from the U.S. who had been living in Japan for a while. He had been dating a Japanese woman for about five months. There had been some small signs—subtle feedback indicating she wanted to do things a little differently—but she kept agreeing to everything he suggested, and on the surface, they seemed happy. He even introduced her to his parents.

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Then, one day, she sat him down and said, I can't do this anymore. I'm not being myself. She ended the relationship right there.

She had created a persona based on the belief that he would not like her authentic self. That was the breaking point. This situation was an exception—truly one in hundreds—but it illustrates the danger of inauthenticity.

Most people who come to a marriage agency are looking for a long-term partner. They already understand that they need to be themselves. If they are not, they know they are unlikely to find a compatible match or build something sustainable. That is something we've consistently emphasized and counseled people on for years.

But yes, in that rare case, the woman simply said, *I can't do this anymore. I'm not being myself, and I don't think he would like who I really am.* So she ended it. It hit him like a ton of bricks, as you can probably imagine. He ended up taking a couple of months off from the search because he was crushed.

What actually happened as a result, though, was quite powerful. We spent some time supporting him while he processed the experience. After about two months, he came back, feeling more grounded. And within a week or so of re-engaging, he met the woman he would eventually marry.

Everything had crystallized and clarified in his mind. He met someone who was completely authentic with him—someone he resonated with—and they aligned naturally. Things progressed quickly, and it became clear to both of them that this was it. They decided to get married, and they've now been happily married for a few years.

Jacobsen: That's wonderful to hear.

Frost: Yes, it's exactly the kind of outcome we strive for—not the heartbreak, of course, but the clarity and connection that can follow. People need to be themselves. When they are not—when they're performing or playing a role—it might seem convincing for a while, just like a good actor in a movie. But even in film, people eventually pick holes in the plot.

Jacobsen: That's a good analogy.

Frost: Thank you. And it's true. When someone plays a role that is not fully thought through or not fully authentic, it eventually unravels. It might seem like the "right" persona, but it is not sustainable. Someone notices the cracks. And it is the same in relationships. Unless you are completely authentic and genuinely aligned with the other person, it is going to fall apart at some point.

Jacobsen: What about sharing parts of your personal story in an appropriate way to build rapport and trust? When you are in the moment and telling your story, but doing it appropriately—reading the other person as you go. It is not performative, but it still helps build rapport and trust because of the honesty involved.

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Frost: Absolutely. That is a vital point. Building rapport is essential to any meaningful relationship. Without rapport, you will not get anywhere. When two people are communicating and sharing parts of their lives, yes—it is incredibly valuable.

But it has to be done with care. If one person keeps jumping in with, "Oh yes, I've done that too," over and over, it can come across as performative or inauthentic.

A better approach is to ask questions and let the conversation flow naturally. That way, the sharing becomes part of a dialogue rather than a monologue. As the conversation deepens, personal stories will surface organically.

Another important point, especially in international relationships, is that people often come from vastly different cultural backgrounds. There may be a lack of shared experience. For example, the school system in the U.S. is very different from the school system in Japan. So their experiences growing up may diverge quite a bit.

In those cases, connection often comes through shared interests—things like music, hobbies, or values. Those commonalities can become a foundation for trust and deeper understanding. So yes, people do need to be mindful of how they share their stories and whether they are assuming commonality. Most true commonality comes from shared belief systems and values. And when it comes to deeper rapport or relationship building, it is those shared *core* values that create the strongest foundation.

Jacobsen: What about gut instinct or intuition during these assessments? How much does that really play a role?

Frost: It plays quite a significant role. Let me give you a bit of background first.

Core values—by definition—are fundamental, often single-word concepts. They're typically intangible. The only exception, arguably, is money, which can have a tangible component. People hold values across all areas of life: relationships, family, career, business, and so on.

When it comes to relationships, the values people often name as essential include love, communication, respect, honesty, and integrity. These values are the foundations upon which belief systems are built.

So, when two people have similar belief systems or beliefs that arise from those shared values, they tend to feel more aligned. Interestingly, many of these values and beliefs do not emerge in an overt or conscious way. Instead, they surface subtly—unconsciously—through the natural flow of conversation.

For example, someone might describe a past experience, and the way they talk about it reveals a value, even if they do not name it directly. The other person then intuitively picks up on that and thinks, *This person seems to see the world like I do.* That is often how alignment starts to take shape.

In the marriage agency context, this becomes especially important. We run a highly structured process. For international clients, most initial introductions happen via Zoom and last about 45

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minutes. In-person introductions, which are more traditional in Japan, often involve something like afternoon tea and typically last around an hour to an hour and a half.

During these meetings, contact details are not exchanged. That only happens after the meeting and only if *both* parties indicate they want to move forward. The idea is to keep the interaction relaxed and focused on conversation—not pressure or expectations.

And it's during these low-pressure, natural conversations that people begin to open up and reveal deeper aspects of themselves. That's when insights surface, and yes, that's when gut instinct—or what some people call intuition—starts to play a role.

Malcolm Gladwell talked about this in his book *Blink*, in a concept called *thin slicing*. It is the idea that people can make remarkably accurate judgments based on very small amounts of information—snap impressions that are surprisingly reliable. And this has been explored in several psychological systems.

In the context of matchmaking, it aligns with what we observe all the time. When people are authentic and relaxed, the signals they send—both verbal and nonverbal—allow the other person to "thin slice" and get a good intuitive sense of compatibility.

Essentially, what this means is that most people form an impression of someone—and have a sense of how well they are going to get along—within just a few seconds of meeting. And the only way that can happen is through unconscious processing, what we typically call gut instinct.

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A Global Renaissance in Real Estate

2025/07/31

Part 1 of 4

Akin Opatola, President of FIABCI-Nigeria and founder of Olawale Jordan Company, explores the evolving landscape of Nigerian and African real estate. Opatola shares his professional journey from banking to real estate, his global perspective shaped by visiting over 40 cities, and the critical role FIABCI plays in cross-border networking, sustainability, and professional collaboration. Opatola transitioned from banking to real estate, leveraging global exposure from visiting 40+ cities. He emphasizes FIABCI's role in cross-border networking, sustainability, and professional collaboration, driving Nigeria's vibrant real estate market, particularly through innovative projects like Eko Atlantic.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we're joined by Akin Opatola, a distinguished Nigerian real estate professional. He serves as the president of FIABCI-Nigeria and is the founder and principal partner of Olawale Jordan Company, a professional real estate brokerage and marketing firm with offices in Lagos and Abuja. Akin is a Chartered Surveyor, Property Valuer, internationally accredited Mediator, and Real Estate Coach. He is also a Fellow of the Institute of Management Consultants and the Chartered Auctioneers of Nigeria.

Akin began his career in banking, spending approximately 12 years in Nigeria's financial services sector, including a role as Branch Manager at a Diamond Bank branch in Apapa, Lagos State. He later transitioned into real estate, becoming a respected coach and mentor. He contributes to educational initiatives and industry events and has facilitated courses at institutions such as Lagos Business School and the School of Estate. Is all of that correct? Thank you for joining me today.

Akin Opatola: My pleasure. It's always a privilege to discuss real estate.

Jacobsen: What is FIABCI's core mission? From your perspective, how has the organization evolved in Nigeria?

Opatola: FIABCI's core mission is facilitating cross-border business, professional networking, and continuous learning among stakeholders in the global built environment. One of the things that attracted me to FIABCI is its international scope. I've had the opportunity to visit over 40 cities worldwide—partly due to my upbringing. My late father was a retired ambassador, so my family lived in different countries throughout my childhood.

When a senior real estate colleague introduced me to FIABCI, I immediately saw it as an opportunity to engage with professionals across borders, deepen my knowledge in real estate, and pursue cross-border transactions. I joined FIABCI about seven years ago, and it has been a very fulfilling journey.

FIABCI-Nigeria has existed for over 50 years—we celebrated our Golden Jubilee in November 2023. We have a strong network of experienced professionals who have made significant contributions to the organization and the advancement of Nigeria's real estate sector.

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Opatola: He was 89—Papa Adegbemile.

Jacobsen: Oh, wow.

Opatola: Yes. So, in terms of demographics, I'm 47 years old, and I'm still considered among the younger members. We have very senior colleagues in FIABCI-Nigeria. The organization has been around for decades, and they've done very well.

Initially, the organization tried to keep membership exclusive to estate surveyors, including me. However, a few years ago, they opened it up to professionals across the built environment, and now there is much more cross-pollination.

We have architects, developers, interior decorators, finance professionals, and bankers. It's amazing. The networking starts even within our national chapter before we can connect internationally.

We have a dedicated WhatsApp group where we share information—not just about real estate. As you may have seen in my profile, I belong to many associations. I enjoy connecting with people and staying informed about developments in my field and related sectors.

We also have another group dedicated to sharing business briefs and ideas. For instance, some of my architect colleagues might message me and say, "Akin, I just designed a building for my client—he's looking for a good sales and marketing executive," and I'm happy to step in. Similarly, when a client needs a reputable architect, I'll recommend someone and share their contact.

So far, FIABCI has been an incredible experience for me.

Jacobsen: Regarding your journey through over 40 countries, what is your biggest lesson from so much international exposure?

Opatola: That's an interesting question. The most significant lesson is the value of diversity.

I did part of my primary school in Rome. Back then, my siblings and I could count from one to one hundred in Italian, sing songs in the language, read fluently, and perform in stage dramas at school—all in Italian. I can barely count to twenty-five in Italian, and my siblings are in the same boat.

But it was a profoundly enriching experience. Meeting people worldwide gave me a broader view of life, culture, and society. It opened my mind and shaped how I interact with people and conduct business today.

It helped me appreciate the beauty of diversity. I joined the African Real Estate Society (AFRES) a few years ago. From a FIABCI perspective, I noticed that Nigeria is the only chapter currently active in Africa. As I mentioned, I love to travel, explore different cultures and try new foods. I'm adventurous, even with cuisine.

Through my involvement with AFRES, I've had the opportunity to travel to Kigali, Addis Ababa, Accra, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Nairobi, and several other African cities. Along the way, I've met many incredible professionals. As they say, your network is your net worth.

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People often ask me, “Akin, can you recommend a good proptech expert in Kenya?” I can make introductions, and people are surprised by my resourcefulness. Friends and family even ask for travel tips: “I’m heading to Johannesburg or Cape Town—where should I stay?” I’ll say, “There’s a lovely boutique hotel called Little Scottyard, and they have fantastic wine.”

People gravitate toward me not just for real estate advice but also because of my openness and international experience. I am genuinely privileged in that regard.

Also, last year, my wife and I received our Canadian visas. We are planning to visit either next year or the year after. I’ve never been to Canada, but I’m looking forward to it.

Jacobsen: Make sure to visit after our annual frost thaw. You’ll enjoy it more that way.

Opatola: [Laughing] I’ll make a note of that.

Jacobsen: Regarding real estate in Nigeria, people may not realize how dynamic the market is. Nigeria is arguably the most vibrant country in Africa in terms of population size and youthful energy. Considering development, interior design, architecture, and other areas of real estate, which sectors do you see as particularly vibrant and poised for growth over the next five to ten years?

Opatola: That’s a very insightful question. Almost all sectors are vibrant—and I’ll explain why.

As you rightly noted, Nigeria has a very young population. I was experimenting with ChatGPT recently, which confirmed that Nigeria’s average age is about 18 years. That’s significant.

That demographic signals opportunity and urgency for developers, architects, and real estate professionals. These are the young people who, within the next five to ten years, will need housing—and not just any housing, but units that suit their lifestyles: one-bedroom, two-bedroom, smaller, more efficient spaces.

Many consultants are already planning for that future. We also face a housing deficit of about 20 million units across Nigeria. In Lagos alone, the deficit is estimated at 4 million units.

We’ve barely scratched the surface in terms of development. Nigeria produces fewer than 2,000 housing units annually, significantly below what is needed. Given this gap, foreign investors are increasingly entering the market—and they are most welcome.

With the current government’s reform agenda, we’re seeing encouraging signs. I recently read that Fitch Ratings upgraded Nigeria’s credit rating. I’m not surprised, as the government’s business-friendly reforms are starting to take effect. Of course, reforms come with short-term challenges—tightening budgets and some economic discomfort—but there’s now a clear light at the end of the tunnel. This is where FIABCI plays an important role.

Our members benefit significantly from international exposure. When we travel and engage with professionals from countries that are far ahead of us in architecture, urban planning, ESG, and sustainability, we gain insights that we bring back home. This helps us advise clients, private developers, and even government stakeholders more effectively—something colleagues without such exposure may not be able to do as easily.

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One exciting development is Eko Atlantic, a sustainable, smart city built on reclaimed land off the coast of Lagos. It's remarkable—wide roads, integrated infrastructure, and an urban design aligned with the concept of the 15-minute city. Residents can access essential amenities like schools, recreation centers, hospitals, supermarkets, and cinemas within a short bike ride or walking distance.

Eko Atlantic is solving many of Lagos's long-standing infrastructure issues. It has caught the attention of Nigerians in the diaspora, and rightly so. The United States Embassy announced plans to build what will become the largest U.S. embassy in the world—right there in Eko Atlantic. The area is futuristic, with no flooding, efficient street lighting, and well-planned infrastructure.

Another milestone: FirstBank, one of Nigeria's oldest and most respected financial institutions, broke ground just three weeks ago on its new head office in Eko Atlantic. At 46 stories, it is slated to be the tallest building in Lagos and will be completed in about four years.

The project involved collaborating with a Nigerian architect and an international firm, underscoring the global partnerships emerging in our sector.

With multinational companies and telecoms now considering a presence in Eko Atlantic, there is an increasing demand for local architects to step up and offer smart, innovative, and future-ready designs that meet the standards and expectations of this new city.

A drone shot of Eko Atlantic looks almost unreal. If you're unfamiliar with it, you might think it's in Las Vegas or Dubai. It's truly remarkable—situated right by the water, with about 25 ongoing projects simultaneously.

Even in my practice, around 60 to 70% of my work involves marketing and sales. My firm has been shortlisted for two developments in Eko Atlantic, handling off-plan sales. I'm very excited about where the country is heading.

A few weeks ago, I attended MIPIM in Cannes, France, arguably the world's largest property exhibition. It allowed me to network with global professionals and experience cutting-edge trends firsthand.

I'm always seeking to stay on the leading edge—whether it's AI in real estate, drone technology, LED display screens, or virtual reality tools for immersive property tours. I return to my office and share this knowledge with my team. It allows us to confidently craft compelling proposals for innovative sales strategies in projects like Eko Atlantic.

Jacobsen: What is the significance of FIABCI's consultative status with the United Nations ECOSOC? How does that status enhance the organization's role globally?

Opatola: It's significant in multiple ways. First, it gives us credibility and institutional recognition—we can proudly say we're connected to the United Nations system.

Second, we gain access to knowledge resources and thought leadership from the UN. At several of our World Congresses, we've had representatives from the UN-Habitat address us, especially on topics like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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FIABCI members are expected to be leaders in conversations around climate change, carbon emissions, and sustainable urban development. This applies even to brokers—how do we advise clients in ways that align with environmental responsibility?

We've also been fortunate to have leaders like Claudia Annamuthoni Elisha, the Executive Director of UN-Habitat from Kenya, scheduled to deliver a keynote address at the upcoming World Congress in Lagos.

Beyond that, FIABCI members are sometimes invited to attend UN sessions virtually and in person. We receive newsletters and regular updates from the UN, keeping us aligned with global development conversations.

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Nimrokh Media: 8 Years of Independent Journalism, in Calgary

2025/07/31

Calgary, Alberta – August 10, 2025 – Nimrokh Media is hosting the 8th anniversary celebration. It is a gathering honouring the work of Afghan journalists. It will reflect on the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban.

The event is on Sunday, August 10, 2025. It happens from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm (Calgary Time). It will be at Banu Kabob Restaurant, 575 28 Street SE, Calgary.

All Canadian media are encouraged to attend the event. Nimrokh Media's commitment to independent journalism is marked by this anniversary, a platform for dialogue and community connection. There will be traditional Afghan music and cuisine. There will be cultural conversations. There will be presentations about press freedom and the future of Afghan journalism.

"This anniversary is not only a celebration of Nimrokh's journey as well as a testament to the resilience of Afghan journalists, and the importance of a free press in the face of adversity," said Fatima Roshanian, Founder of Nimrokh Media.

Event Highlights

- **Guest Speakers:** Parwiz Kawa, Zahra Nader, and Carolyn Campbell, with a special segment by Fatima Roshanian on personal stories of resistance and resilience.

Tickets and RSVP

- **Ticket Price:** $35 per person (covers event costs)
- **Payment:** E-transfer to **mail@nimrokhmedia.com** (please include your name and number of tickets)
- **Press Access:** Journalists attending as press are welcome as guests — no ticket required.
- **RSVP:** Kindly confirm your attendance in advance.

Additional donations to support Nimrokh Media's journalism are welcome.

About Nimrokh Media

Nimrokh Media is an independent platform dedicated to elevating the voices of Afghan women and marginalized communities, advocating for press freedom, and telling the stories that matter most. Since its founding, Nimrokh has become a vital source of truth and a symbol of resilience for Afghan journalists in exile.

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Stephen Frost on Cross-Cultural Matchmaking, Shinto Intuition, and Building Authentic Relationships in Japan

2025/08/01

Part 2 of 2

Stephen Frost, founder of *Marriage Matching* in Osaka, Japan, shares his expertise on international matchmaking grounded in authenticity, intuitive insight, and cross-cultural understanding. In conversation with Scott Douglas Jacobsen, Frost explores how unconscious processing, values alignment, and effective communication drive lasting relationships. Drawing from Japanese cultural contexts like *Shinto* and structured practices such as *omiai*, he emphasizes the importance of trusting gut instinct, navigating change, and communicating openly. Frost also reflects on the geopolitical shift toward logic over intuition, and how emotional honesty and respect allow relationships to evolve or end gracefully. His insights offer a roadmap to meaningful, global connection.

Stephen Frost, founder of *Marriage Matching* in Osaka, Japan, shares his expertise on international matchmaking rooted in authenticity, self-awareness, and psychological insight. Frost discusses how self-esteem and unconscious processing shape dating dynamics, why gut instinct and shared values matter more than surface traits, and how structured introductions like *omiai* foster genuine connection. Drawing from real-world experience, he explores the psychology of compatibility, the dangers of inauthentic behavior, and how open, respectful communication enables long-term relationship success—especially across cultures. The interview offers a practical, thoughtful roadmap to finding love in a globalized world.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Are there different cultural interpretations of that? For instance, how would someone in Perth, Australia experience this compared to someone in Tokyo or Kyoto, Japan?

Stephen Frost: On a societal level, many people are taught to focus on logic and rational thinking. That emphasis is not necessarily tied to one specific culture—it's more of a modern, global trend. However, when we look specifically at Japan, there's a unique spiritual underpinning that comes into play.

The predominant indigenous spiritual system here is Shinto. While it faded in influence for a time, it has been making a significant comeback. In Shinto, there's a belief that everything is connected—everything has spirit, or *kami*. So a rock is not just a rock. It has its own energy, and it is connected to you in a way that transcends conscious communication.

You may not be able to consciously or even unconsciously *interact* with it in a conventional sense, but on a deeper, sub-level—this is where some draw parallels with concepts in quantum mechanics—everything is interconnected. This worldview contrasts sharply with most Western frameworks, which tend to view objects and people as distinct, separate entities.

So when we talk about gut instinct or intuition in the Japanese context, it's often related to this deeper idea of spiritual and energetic connection. You might not know where a signal or feeling is coming from, but you *know* you are receiving something—and that something matters.

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In contrast, in Western systems—and increasingly even within Japanese society—there's a push to rely on logic and to move away from intuition. People are taught to analyze rather than feel. This shift has made it harder for some individuals to trust or even recognize their gut instincts.

Jacobsen: That sounds like more than just a cultural issue. Is this also geopolitical in scope?

Frost: Absolutely. On a broader geopolitical level, there's been a long-standing institutional push to train people to think more logically and less intuitively. That is not inherently bad, of course. You do not want people making emotionally driven decisions all the time. Rational thought is essential, especially in public life, business, and governance.

But there are situations—particularly in high-stakes environments—where gut instinct can be more reliable than conscious logic. You see this especially in fields like day trading or military combat. Speak to experienced traders or combat veterans, and many will describe moments when they had an overwhelming instinct to take a certain action. They could not explain why in the moment, but afterward, it was clear that their decision was right.

When it comes to relationships, this becomes even more relevant. People are trying to find an ideal life partner. The number of variables involved in achieving that kind of alignment is massive. I would not go so far as to call it *infinite*, but it certainly approaches an uncountable range—because most of it is happening below the level of conscious awareness.

Gut instinct plays a major role. People might not be able to articulate why they feel drawn to someone, but that does not make it any less valid. Often, it is the unconscious mind doing the heavy lifting—assessing compatibility, filtering for shared values, and responding to subtle cues that logic alone might miss.

When you're working at a coaching level—especially during a values elicitation for someone, whether it's related to relationships or another part of their life—you're aiming to uncover their top ten most important values. That process can take time. There are other values that fall just below those top ten, which are still meaningful, but they do not carry the same weight. Then, from those value systems, belief systems emerge—and alignment in those beliefs is equally important in a long-term relationship.

Consider this: if someone is in their twenties, they already have two decades of life experience, choices, learned behaviors, belief structures, and values. Truly getting to know someone at that level of depth takes a long time. But in modern dating—where people often only have a few dates to assess compatibility—most of that information cannot be accessed consciously. You simply do not have enough time.

Now, if the person is in their thirties, forties, or beyond, they have even more life experience. They have made more decisions, encountered more situations, and refined their understanding of what they value in a partner. This adds further complexity to their internal makeup, and consequently, finding alignment becomes more challenging.

So what happens? You *have* to rely on the unconscious. You *have* to trust that gut instinct—that internal sense that tells you whether there's alignment or not.

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Jacobsen: What if everything seems planned right—good intentions, matching profiles—but the interaction starts off awkward or disconnected? How can someone reset the course appropriately?

Frost: That always comes down to communication. And it is one of the reasons communication is consistently listed among the top three most important factors in any successful relationship.

If people are open and honest with one another—and if there's also love and mutual respect—then they can usually find a path forward together. People often talk about compromise, but there is a misconception around that word. To many, "compromise" means that one person must give up something important and simply conform to the other person's wishes. But that is not true compromise.

Effective communication leads to mutual understanding. And in strong relationships, what you often see resembles skilled negotiation—both people making subtle shifts in their beliefs and expectations so they can create unity and harmony together.

Sometimes, people hold on to past emotional baggage, old patterns, or fears that disrupt new relationships. They may be afraid of certain things repeating—so they project those fears into the current situation and act in ways intended to avoid them. Ironically, those very actions can actually bring about the outcome they feared.

Clear, calm communication—not just honest, but *calm* and *clear*—is essential. It allows both people to navigate through challenges and find ways to grow together. As long as love and respect are present, there is usually a path forward.

And it is important to remember: people are constantly evolving. We are changing all the time—sometimes in ways we do not even notice. Just walking down the street, taking in new sights, having new thoughts, reflecting on past experiences—all of that subtly reshapes how we think, what we value, and how we connect.

When you read a book or watch a movie, those experiences can amplify or diminish different elements within your belief structures. When larger life events happen—accidents, major transitions, or truly life-changing moments—you often see more significant shifts in a person's behavior and outlook. These shifts are noticeable at the conscious level, both to the individual and those around them.

But the truth is, the mind is organic. Every moment of every day, it is evolving. Subtle internal changes are always taking place. And it is only through honest and open communication that people can stay aligned through those changes, maintain unity, and build long-term harmony in their relationships.

Jacobsen: If things are going well, how do you continue? How do you naturally set up the next step or a second meeting? And if things are going poorly, how do you hit the "emergency exit" with a soft landing?

Frost: If things are going well, you let them progress naturally. But it helps to have structure. Sometimes people struggle to know what their partner is thinking. Again, this comes back to

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open communication, trust, and mutual respect. If those elements are in place, you can talk things through and move forward with clarity.

Now, on the other hand, if things start feeling unclear—or if one person begins to sense that something isn't quite right—it becomes more complicated. Sometimes it is obvious that things are not going to work out. Other times, the feeling is just vague: *This does not feel quite right to me anymore.*

When someone starts feeling that way, it is usually a sign that they need to take a step back and reflect.

As a marriage agency, we have a rule: from the point of a successful introduction, people should decide whether they are heading toward marriage within six months. The reason is simple—most people know within two or three months whether they are compatible for marriage. If a couple is still unsure after six months, it is usually a sign that something is missing.

Time alone does not resolve fundamental mismatches. Unless someone undergoes a profound, self-chosen shift in their values or outlook—which is rare—extra time does not change the dynamic.

Now, as for a soft exit: it is only possible if both people have that same foundation of communication, trust, and respect. When those are present, it is easier for both to say, "You're right, this isn't working. We both deserve to find the right person." That kind of mutual clarity allows for a graceful, respectful ending.

But if those fundamentals are missing, soft exits become much harder. And this brings us back to the core of every healthy relationship: honesty, communication, mutual understanding, and the ability to work together in a harmonious way.

Jacobsen: Do you have any favorite quotes about this?

Frost: [Laughing] Yikes. And now my mind goes completely blank.

Jacobsen: It reminds me of something funny. There's this story about how expert pitchers are asked to explain how they throw a ball. They give long, detailed answers—mechanics, mindset, strategy, the whole thing. And yet, every single one of them is wrong.

It turns out that among true experts, this is common. There's a huge amount of subconscious processing—knowledge and skill that is hidden even from themselves. They *do* it, but they do not fully *know* how they do it. It is all happening below the surface.

That is very much the same with relationships and intuition. We process so much unconsciously. We make assessments we can't articulate. And often, the best thing we can do is trust what we feel—while staying grounded in honest, calm communication.

Frost: So it's probably a similar thing. Again, it comes down to that whole idea of unconscious processing. One example that came up in a conversation with one of my mentors and trainers was about performing at high levels unconsciously. He explained that to truly operate at a higher level—whether in life, work, or relationships—you have to be functioning from that unconscious space.

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Take top-level Formula One drivers, for instance. When they're asked why they made certain decisions during a race—why they took a turn a certain way, or how they reacted so quickly—they often cannot explain it. It is all instinctive, reactive behavior. There's no time for conscious thought. If they tried to consciously process each action, it would take too long. The delay would cost them.

So, here's a quote—from me, if I may:

"As with everything in life, when building a relationship—especially with someone you're considering as a potential marriage partner—always be completely open and honest. It may not get you the outcome you want with that particular person. But if that's the case, they're not the right person for you. And that's okay. Because they will make space for the right person to come into your life. To build something lasting, you need to be with someone who can see you clearly—and love you as you are."

Jacobsen: Beautifully said. Thank you very much for your time today. I really appreciate it.

Frost: Sounds good. Feel free to reach out anytime.

Jacobsen: Thank you again. I really appreciate your time and expertise.

Frost: Thank you. Take care.

From Autoimmune Attack to Psychogenic Death: The Tragic Love Story of Peter and Eileen

2025/08/06

On December 20, 2017, Peter died. His body destroyed itself in an autoimmune attack. He was knocked out. Doctors connected him to an assistive machine. It kept his body alive, while 'asleep.' His lungs filled with fluid. They needed draining by the machinery of plastic, metal, and electronics.

Loved ones gathered around. They knew. It was time to begin the end. His body shut off between the morning into the early afternoon with the closing down of the machine keeping his unconscious body alive.

Death, to not be; Pete met the proverbial scythe of the unending eternal. Weeks passed to months and then a few years. Eileen couldn't manage the pain, the void, the vacuum of Pete's memories in her. More than 60 years of the union met as a singlet, a widow.

All unions meet the inevitability of an end with the ever-present two-word question, "Who first?" No matter the depth of the love, the thread-count of the connection, the amiability of the friendship, or the years built after one another. Death cares not for these; lovers do.

In this sense, lovers represent life, itself.

Holding onto a photo of Peter, Eileen met with family members in the early and early-middle parts of February 2021. To reconcile, to meet, to discuss life and love, while drifting in and out of consciousness, she was probably undergoing a psychogenic death.

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Little sleep, no eating or minimal food intake, barely sipping water, the implosion of the self over a bond broken. “I’m coming, Pete,” over and over again. She just wanted to be home because her current house was a stranger’s abode, lonely and alone.

February 14, 2021, Valentine’s Day — poetically, Eileen Jacobsen died. Maybe, she met her valentine, maybe not. A Sunday departure from the stage. The Thursday before, some grandchildren visited her.

She turned to one and said, “Oh, hi, Scott.” A greeting meeting the last visit before the final, “Bye.”

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Caroline Geraghty on Authentic Dating: CORE Method, Confidence, and Compassionate Communication

2025/08/06

Part 2 of 2

Caroline Geraghty explores the dynamics of authenticity, vulnerability, and communication in early dating. She emphasizes self-awareness through her CORE method—Center, Observe, Reflect, Express—and offers practical advice on managing nerves, reading cues, and fostering genuine dialogue. Geraghty highlights the value of curiosity in balancing storytelling and listening, setting respectful boundaries, and navigating both connection and disconnection with grace. Whether planning a second date or soft-landing an exit, she stresses the importance of honesty and emotional intelligence. Her insights encourage openness, kindness, and clarity—building meaningful relationships while honoring one's values, intentions, and the time of others.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How do you balance storytelling and listening when you're first trying to gauge a person's rhythm? Some people lean into storytelling more; others prefer to listen. How do you figure out how much to lean in or pull back in either direction?

Caroline Geraghty: That's such a great question. One way I find helpful is to dig deeper with curiosity.

For instance, someone might say, "I'm from here," or "I grew up there," and discuss their hometown or background a bit. You can build on that by noticing potential shared experiences or emotional cues. If it sounds like they moved around a lot, you might say, "Oh, it sounds like you moved around a lot—how did that make you feel as a kid?"

Let's say they mention that their parents were in the military and that they lived on different bases. That opens up a whole layer of experience you can connect with. Even when you're sharing your own story, reflect on something that invites them to open up more.

So, in that example, if they say, "I moved a lot," you could say, "Oh, I also had to change schools in fifth grade—it was hard for me to make friends, too. But eventually, I found my footing through [X, Y, or Z]." That shared emotional territory deepens the conversation and builds an authentic connection.

Jacobsen: So you're opening the conversation for them while also allowing yourself to share more about you. What if someone's authentic self is less self-confident?

Geraghty: Absolutely. When it comes to self-confidence, one thing I feel serves everyone—and is serving me right now—is this: you have to do it. You have to put yourself out there.

It starts with understanding your goals for that specific connection. Are you looking for a partner to share your life with? Or someone to enjoy certain activities with? Understanding your motivation behind building a connection helps frame the interaction with purpose.

Then lean into that. Be the type of partner you'd like to have. Recognize that you already have everything you need to attract the kind of person you're looking for in your life.

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And if nothing else—give your best friend a call before the date. You should have someone in your life who can hype you up when you're feeling low. Lean into your village when you need that confidence boost, for sure.

Jacobsen: What about people and their phones—or smartwatches?

Geraghty: Yes—such an important point. There's a part of your brain that immediately picks up on something, feeling "off." It's a survival mechanism that has been left over from evolution. Even though, as modern humans, we're creatures of comfort, that part of the brain still gets activated—especially when someone seems inauthentic, overly rehearsed, or distracted.

Therefore, it's worth centring taking a moment to center yourself and observe your habits. Reflect on how those habits might impact connection. If you're someone who fidgets a lot or constantly checks your phone, I'd recommend putting the phone away—at least face down.

Now, if you need to have it out—say you're a parent and want to be available in case there's an emergency, or you're in a high-responsibility job—then be forthright about it at the beginning of the date. Communicate clearly and respectfully.

You might say: "Hey, I'm a mom, and my child is with a new babysitter tonight. I'd feel more comfortable having my phone visible, just in case. I appreciate your understanding, and I'll be mindful not to check it more than necessary. But if it starts to feel like I'm disengaged, please let me know—I'll adjust."

That may seem like a lot to put on someone you just met. But if this is someone who could become your partner, it's also a great way to see how they respond to honesty and healthy communication.

Jacobsen: Now, these are forks in the road. So—how do you soft-land an exit, especially an early one? On the other hand, how do you set up a second meeting if it goes well?

Geraghty: Oh my gosh, yes. I love this.

One thing I always come back to is leaning into your authentic self and being honest—gracefully. If you didn't feel a connection or chemistry, you can still thank the person for their time and consideration. Maybe say something like, "I appreciated the conversation and the chance to get to know you."

You don't have to say it was great if it wasn't. There are other words you can use—"interesting," "thought-provoking," "insightful." You can acknowledge that it was meaningful to share space with them without pretending it was something it wasn't. But lean into the words that feel right for you. Don't oversell it—because that's also a form of feedback.

Something like, "Hey, I enjoyed our time together. It feels like we may not be aligned on some of the things that are important to me. I truly hope you find what you're looking for—someone who's a better fit for you." And encourage them genuinely.

On the other hand, if you're enjoying the date, let them know. Please let them know that you'll be reaching out shortly. Plan for a second date as you say goodbye—or reference something they mentioned enjoying during your conversation. For example: "Hey, I know you love ice cream.

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There's a great spot near my gym. I'd love for us to meet there. What does your schedule look like this coming week?"

If you're not interested, express gratitude, thank them for their time, and wish them well on their journey toward partnership. But if you're excited—lock it in. Pull out your phone and put that next date in the calendar.

Jacobsen: What if it's the reverse—if they let *you* know it's not a match? How do you accept that?

Geraghty: Whether it's the former—with grace—or the latter—with enthusiasm and promptness, the response should still come from a place of authenticity. So, if you're being rejected after the first date, do the same: say thank you and wish them well. All they're doing is opening the door for your time and energy to be redirected toward someone who *is* the right fit for you.

If anything—especially as an older woman—I consider myself lucky. I met my husband when we were freshmen in high school, so I haven't had to navigate the dating jitters many of my peers have. But I've lived vicariously through the journeys of my girlfriends—especially now, in the age of dating apps and second marriages.

And I've seen how valuable honesty is. Is someone letting you go because it's not the right fit? That's a gift. They're giving you back the most valuable commodity we have—our time.

So, meet that moment with grace and gratitude. You now have the time to focus on yourself and find a better fit.

If I'm the one receiving that enthusiasm—if a first date goes well—then yes, I'm putting it on my calendar. I'll follow up. I'll check in. I'll ask how their day's going. I'll look for small opportunities to build connections.

And that goes both ways. If someone is enthusiastic about a second date but I don't feel the same, it's still an opportunity to show respect. I might say, "Hey, I enjoyed our time together, but I don't think this is the right fit." You could offer to stay connected in a social or professional context.

That may sound strange—but if someone in your social circle might be a better match for them, why not? Or invite them to a social event you're planning. Something like, "A bunch of us are hanging out at the gym pool—come by and join us."

You can say: "I enjoy who you are as a person, but I don't see this as a romantic fit."

Jacobsen: Caroline, thank you so much for your time today. I appreciate it.

Geraghty: Fantastic. Thank you so much, Scott. Have a great day.

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Understanding Psychometric Limitations

2025/08/06

I stand by the mainstream standards of psychometrics: APA, BPS, and CPA standards. The *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (co-published by APA, AERA, and NCME) outlines the stringent test construction and validation requirements. Tests not adhering to these standards are not considered psychometrically credible instruments. First, individuals must not have conflicts of interest in creating, administering, or scoring psychometric tests. Otherwise, the results become invalid by professional standards, whether friends with the scorer, the hirer of the scorer or working for the company in which the score has been claimed validated. Any such score cannot be considered valid when a clear conflict of interest is present.

High-range tests began in the late 20th century. They attempt to measure intelligence beyond the ceilings of professionally accepted instruments. Their development occurred largely outside institutional psychology, which has resulted in widespread methodological flaws and a lack of academic legitimacy. The high-range testing community (e.g., Prometheus Society, Mega Society, etc.) features self-created tests often designed by individuals without formal training in psychometrics.

Many of these people work with one another, for one another, found and join societies, then invite one another's participation, and then take their friends' tests and garner a listing on the rankings or directories. While some independent efforts reflect intellectual seriousness and commitment, they remain outside the scope of recognized professional standards. Their creators are intellectually serious. However, most lack doctorates in psychometrics or clinical psychology, licenses from relevant bodies, and their tests are not peer-reviewed or professionally validated. The overlapping roles of test creators, scorers, and participants within small, insular communities raise valid concerns about objectivity and the independence of results.

According to Mensa International's former international supervisory psychometrician, Dr. Kristóf Kovács, even scores above ~145 on SD 15 are unreliable after that point. Not just him, according to Dr. Abbie Salny and other psychometricians, most mainstream IQ tests (e.g., WAIS-IV, SB5) have diminishing reliability past 130–145 SD15, even under proctored conditions. Beyond 145 on SD 15, scores become increasingly speculative due to standard error of measurement and ceiling effects.

Fundamentally, a claim of an IQ score out of these would be illegitimate, particularly as the higher rarities of IQ are claimed. This would mean above 145 on SD 15 *if these were mainstream and proctored by certified professionals*. Even there, that is based on the best professional tools. This is to say, IQ tests developed without psychometric oversight—self-administered, untimed, and unproctored—are typically non-standardized and lack validity and reliability as psychological instruments. That is, they violate standardization, reliability, and validity criteria. They are often unnormed and lack clinical controls.

To be considered a valid psychological instrument, a test must meet three core criteria: validity (it measures what it claims to measure), reliability (it produces consistent results over time and contexts), and standardization (it has been normed on a sufficiently large and representative

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sample under controlled conditions). Tests that do not meet these criteria—especially those created outside professional oversight—cannot produce scores that meaningfully reflect cognitive ability in the same manner.

Some high-range tests employ inflated standard deviations to generate higher numerical scores. While this may appear impressive to lay readers, it is mathematically misleading and lacks empirical justification within a scientifically valid norming structure. Disseminating inflated or unsupported IQ scores can mislead individuals about their cognitive abilities, reinforce elitist attitudes, and erode public trust in psychological science. Ethical responsibility demands accuracy, humility, and transparency in any discussion of intelligence testing. Such claims are not recognized as valid by contemporary professional standards and should not be equated with WAIS-V, SB5, or Raven's APM scores—each of which is psychometrically credible only when administered under professionally controlled conditions. Therefore, any claim to this or that IQ score falls into the same illegitimate category by those mainstream, well-established standards.

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Frenchy

2025/08/07

I knew a guy one time at the construction site as a teenager.
He was French, so a French-y kinda guy.
We used to all sit around having lunch at a 3-storey building.
Just a bunch of random guys, working, sort of,
a lot of nonsense talk havin' fun,
just pissing around putting a frame on air.
People are big on that,
enclosures.
I learned that pretty young.
We yearn for the forest trails,
a lake to fish,
a starry night to gaze.
A thoughtful comment at sunset,
to genuflect.
Frenchy used to walk with a limp.
He'd have his belt around his waist to carry tools.
His toolbelt.
Many men used to die during construction projects.
Many still do.
Safety harnesses, hardhats, spotters, safety personnel.
These help.
Ol' Frenchy one time started slipping at an older site,
story goes.
Slipping off rooftop, no harness, missed the grip,
whoosh!
Off he went.
He fell several stories.
He landed on a bump of rocks that are crushed called 'crush rock.'
Common in construction of the time, probably now.

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Frenchy snapped his back.

Ever since,

a limp.

That's life.

Concrete forms,

the walls that make the frames for air, boxes for air.

You know, the stuff people like.

As the concrete is poured, it gets vibrated to remove air pockets.

Clamps hold the wooden framework.

A wooden framework holding the poured and vibrated concrete.

Those are held together by steel clamps.

They get piled.

Beside the pile of crush rock,

was a pile of steel clamps,

Frenchy just missed it.

Likely outcome, if a little over on the fall,

he woulda been dead.

That's also life.

So, he had a limp.

We all had something like a limp.

just our limp wasn't a limp.

We didn't get asked about our limps.

We got asked about progress on the air boxes.

You know, the stuff people like,

care about.

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Irina Tsukerman on Trump's South Africa Asylum Policy and Elon Musk's Starlink Role in Ukraine

2025/08/08

Part 1 of 4

Irina Tsukerman is a human rights and national security attorney based in New York and Connecticut. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in National and Intercultural Studies and Middle East Studies from Fordham University in 2006, followed by a Juris Doctor from Fordham University School of Law in 2009. She operates a boutique national security law practice. She serves as President of Scarab Rising, Inc., a media and security strategic advisory firm. Additionally, she is the Editor-in-Chief of *The Washington Outsider*, which focuses on foreign policy, geopolitics, security, and human rights. She is actively involved in several professional organizations, including the American Bar Association's Energy, Environment, and Science and Technology Sections, where she serves as Program Vice Chair in the Oil and GasCommittee. She is also a member of the New York City Bar Association. She serves on the Middle East and North Africa Affairs Committee and affiliates with the Foreign and Comparative Law Committee.

In this wide-ranging conversation, **Scott Douglas Jacobsen** and Irina Tsukerman dissect Trump-era refugee policies favoring white South Africans as racially selective and legally dubious. She also argued that Elon Musk's restriction of Starlink services in Ukraine, especially during key military advances, effectively supported Russian interests and undermined Ukrainian sovereignty. Tsukerman highlighted the dangers of U.S. reliance on private actors for national security infrastructure and called for stricter contractual controls to prevent unilateral interference in geopolitically sensitive conflicts.

Interview conducted July 25.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Once again, we're here with the 'Washington Outsider' for the *Everywhere Insiders*—the wonderful Irina Tsukerman. Thank you for joining me again today.

Irina Tsukerman: Always a pleasure.

Jacobsen: Today, we're broadcasting all sources from *Reuters*. I'm calling in from Charles Degaulle Airport in France, late in the evening on Friday, July 25—just passing the time while getting everything set up. So, first, diplomats have reportedly asked whether the Trump-era refugee policy for South Africans was intended to include only white applicants, or if nonwhite South Africans could also qualify.

According to a 2018 email obtained during litigation, a Trump official stated the refugee program was being explicitly considered for white South Africans, particularly Afrikaners, who were allegedly facing discrimination. However, the State Department publicly maintained that U.S. asylum law does not discriminate by race, and that eligibility is based on credible fear of persecution regardless of racial background. This apparent contradiction has caused confusion and concern, especially in light of the administration's broader track record on immigration. What are your thoughts on this?

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Tsukerman: I'm not sure this is simply a case of confusion. It seems more like an attempt to clean up what could be interpreted as a racially selective or discriminatory asylum policy. One that would reflect poorly on the administration.

Let's look at the facts. The justification given by some officials for prioritizing white South Africans—particularly Afrikaners—was that they faced increasing threats, land seizures, and discrimination under post-apartheid government policies. Then-President Trump tweeted in 2018 that he had asked the Secretary of State to look into land expropriations and "large-scale killing of farmers," echoing rhetoric often associated with far-right narratives.

Now, the claim of a "white genocide" in South Africa has been widely debunked by both local and international experts. While farm attacks and murders do occur and some Afrikaners feel targeted, there is no evidence of a coordinated campaign or genocide. That said, South Africa's land reform policies and affirmative action programs have been controversial and, in some cases, have affected white farmers economically.

So, while there may be cases of legitimate asylum claims from individuals of any race in South Africa, the idea of prioritizing only *white* South Africans for refugee status is highly suspect, especially when the U.S. was, at the same time, limiting asylum access for Black and brown migrants from Central America, the Middle East, and elsewhere.

And here's the legal dilemma: if a nonwhite Afrikaner—or, for that matter, any nonwhite South African—experienced the same discrimination and threats as a white counterpart, would they be considered eligible under this supposed policy?

That question exposes a core tension. On one hand, the administration claims to be assisting those who have been "discriminated against." On the other hand, if language or culture (like speaking Afrikaans) is being used as a proxy for race, it raises red flags. Restricting eligibility in practice to white applicants, regardless of their actual circumstances, would violate U.S. asylum law.

Also telling is the lack of actual uptake: very few South Africans, white or otherwise, sought asylum in the U.S. in response to this policy shift. That suggests the issue may have been overstated for political effect—perhaps more about signalling than substance.

All in all, this policy appears legally flimsy, morally questionable, and politically awkward. And the administration's clumsy messaging only deepens the controversy.

If people are truly in such dire straits—facing what they describe as genocide, discrimination, or mass violence—why wouldn't they take the opportunity to seek refuge in a haven where they wouldn't be at risk? That's why I question whether this issue has been politicized beyond recognition.

There's no clear evidence of genocide, or even mass violence, in South Africa that would make this refugee policy more relevant than, say, Haiti, where a U.S. court only recently extended Temporary Protected Status until February, despite the administration's efforts to deport thousands. Or take Turkey, where we've seen large-scale violence and state-sponsored crackdowns, or other countries dealing with war-like conditions.

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Yes, South Africa has racial tensions. But do those tensions rise to a level that warrants special refugee protections for one specific group?

I'm not convinced. And to be clear, there is no genocide in South Africa. I think, quite simply, the administration wants to stick to the kind of red-meat policies that appeal to their base—for better or worse—but they're also aware of the legal and diplomatic fallout. How this looks to the international community, to legal experts, to everyone outside the hardcore MAGA base—it's not good. Frankly, the optics are terrible.

Jacobsen: Musk reportedly ordered the shutdown of Starlink satellite service once Ukraine retook territory from Russia.

To be clear for the transcript: Russia annexed Ukrainian land illegally. Ukraine has since retaken portions of that land. Musk then disabled Starlink service, at least in those newly liberated areas, if not entirely, depending on which report youbelieve.

What's your take on this? What do you think is the reasonable inference behind Musk's rationale? Is this consistent with his behaviour since 2022?

Tsukerman: To be perfectly honest, this only reinforces my personal view that Musk wants Russia to win the war, or at the very least, he doesn't want Ukraine to win and reclaim its full sovereignty.

This isn't the first time we've seen something like this. Musk previously restricted Ukraine's use of Starlink for offensive military operations. The terminals were limited to defensive communications only until the U.S. government negotiated a separate contract that allowed for broader military use.

You could argue Musk was motivated by profit or risk aversion, but he never seemed to place any moral or strategic pressure on Russia. He treated both sides as equally complicit in the conflict, as if Ukraine hadn't been invaded and wasn't fighting for its survival. That kind of moral equivalence is deeply flawed.

You cannot defend your population if you're not able to go on the offensive against invading forces. That's the basic logic of self-defence. Denying Ukraine the communication tools it needs to conduct offensive operations directly undermines its ability to win the war and protect its people.

Jacobsen: It's being reported that Russia may have gained access to Starlink technology as well.

Tsukerman: Yes. There were reports that Russian forces somehow gained access to Starlink terminals, or at least to Starlink connectivity. It hasn't been fully explained how that happened, but the optics are damaging. There's a strong implication that Musk or his companies were, at best, careless, or at worst, complicit in letting those systems fall into Russian hands.

What's most striking is the timing, the moment Ukraine started making real gains by retaking occupied land and launching legitimate military operations against Russian military and logistical targets, Musk abruptly shut down access to Starlink. Not because civilians were

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harmed. Not because Ukraine violated some humanitarian principle. But it seems that Ukraine dared to push forward.

He claimed the move was to prevent escalation or offensive use. He never placed any similar restrictions on Russia's offensive actions. He didn't block Russian communications when they were bombing civilians, torturing prisoners, or trying to wipe out Ukrainian infrastructure. His 'neutrality' wasn't neutral. It consistently advantaged Russia.

The only reasonable conclusion is that Musk didn't want Ukraine to succeed beyond the point where it could simply survive. He seemed to want Ukraine to endure for the U.S. and other parties to keep paying for his services without allowing a decisive Ukrainian victory.

If Ukraine were to lose entirely, Starlink would no longer be of strategic value to the U.S. government. That would undercut his contracts and his influence. It's not about doing good in the world. It's about profit, power, and control.

Otherwise, Musk would have provided the Starlink services for free and without restrictions, which was not the case. What this tells us is that the U.S. government is dangerously reliant on a private individual for a critical tool of geopolitics. While other countries and private entities are now developing similar satellite communication systems, the fact that the U.S. government didn't invest early in acquiring this technology independently is a major strategic miscalculation.

Today, it's Ukraine. Tomorrow, it could be Taiwan and China. We also know that Musk reportedly refused to provide Starlink coverage for U.S. military operations in the Taiwan Strait. That's another layer of concern.

But beyond that, I don't understand why—after the previous incidents involving Musk's interference in Ukraine's use of Starlink—the U.S. government didn't include an exclusivity clause in its contracts. Something that would guarantee government control over strategic use and limit Musk's ability to impose his conditions.

Sure, pay Musk fairly for the service—but in return, he shouldn't be allowed to unilaterally decide when or how the network can be used during conflicts. If he does, there should be substantial penalties or breach-of-contract consequences. There are many ways to leverage someone like Musk. He needs government business, and there's still significant prestige in working with the U.S. government—prestige he may not get elsewhere.

Now, Europe is developing its satellite systems. Taiwan is too. Musk's monopoly in this private satellite sector is narrowing. The U.S. should have recognized that the window of opportunity was closing and acted accordingly.

The only reason I suspect they didn't is because Trump's policy—at least during his administration—was aligned mainly with Musk in this area. Either Trump wanted Russia to win, or, if that wasn't possible, he didn't want Ukraine to win outright. So, he let Musk play this dangerous game.

The administration could have applied enormous pressure on Musk through contract threats, legal tools, even regulatory and tax scrutiny—to ensure continued service. But they didn't.

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Unfortunately, this seems to reflect how extensive Russia's influence over U.S. policy may still be.

Many continue to claim Russian influence is a hoax. But the fact that a private citizen is allowed to dictate the military communications policy of a U.S. ally tells a different story. Russia never stopped meddling in U.S. affairs—and the U.S. government has, in many ways, allowed it.

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Irina Tsukerman on Trump's Trade Tactics, Sudan's Islamist Resurgence, and Gaza Aid Breakdown

2025/08/09

Part 2 of 4

Irina Tsukerman is a human rights and national security attorney based in New York and Connecticut. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in National and Intercultural Studies and Middle East Studies from Fordham University in 2006, followed by a Juris Doctor from Fordham University School of Law in 2009. She operates a boutique national security law practice. She serves as President of Scarab Rising, Inc., a media and security strategic advisory firm. Additionally, she is the Editor-in-Chief of *The Washington Outsider*, which focuses on foreign policy, geopolitics, security, and human rights. She is actively involved in several professional organizations, including the American Bar Association's Energy, Environment, and Science and Technology Sections, where she serves as Program Vice Chair in the Oil and GasCommittee. She is also a member of the New York City Bar Association. She serves on the Middle East and North Africa Affairs Committee and affiliates with the Foreign and Comparative Law Committee.

In this interview, human rights and national security attorney Irina Tsukerman joins **Scott Douglas Jacobsen** to discuss Donald Trump's golf trip to Scotland, its political undercurrents, and the challenges of U.S.–EU trade talks under his zero-sum approach. She critiques Trump's reluctance to pressure Russia meaningfully, outlines Sudan's Islamist resurgence amid alliances with the military, and examines the RSF's resource-driven power struggle. Tsukerman also addresses allegations of UNRWA's ties to Hamas, highlighting stalled aid at Gaza's border and bureaucratic failures that delayed humanitarian relief. Her analysis connects geopolitical maneuvering, resource control, and political opportunism to broader instability and diplomatic inaction.

Interview conducted July 25.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: In other news, President Trump has reportedly flown to Scotland to play golf and engage in bilateral trade talks with the EU. Quick thoughts on the golf, and more serious comments on the trade discussions?

Irina Tsukerman: Well, given how quiet the world is right now—sarcasm intended—I suppose it's the perfect time to play golf in Scotland. That said, Trump rarely travels just for leisure. There are likely business angles involved.

There are actors in Scotland he's worked with before. The Scottish National Party, for instance, has received financial backing from foreign sources, including Russia and Qatar. It's precisely the kind of anti-establishment, anti-globalist movement that both Trump and Musk have tacitly supported in the past. Whether it's symbolic or substantial, the fact that Trump is engaging in bilateral talks while courting those kinds of actors should not be overlooked.

It's become, essentially, a proxy for foreign-aligned interference in the United Kingdom. These are the kind of figures who could informally meet Trump over lunch or during a friendly round

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of golf—and then, shortly afterward, we might see certain political developments emerge that align with those interests inside the UK.

Meanwhile, the Reform Party is gaining traction and appears to be getting support from American political actors—potentially even inspiring U.S.-style movements of their own, despite, or perhaps because of, their failings in the American context.

Now, regarding the bilateral U.S.–EU trade talks, the issue Trump faces is that the EU has significant leverage. That's why his threats or pressure tactics don't easily sway them.

Ideally, we would see a free trade agreement between the U.S. and the EU—one that removes most tariffs and fosters mutual market access. This is especially relevant now, as the EU seems increasingly open to trade with China, even as Chinese policies raise red flags, like the export of cheap electric vehicles, many of which come with concerns over data security and surveillance.

American goods, in comparison, should be welcomed. And if European consumers ultimately choose not to buy U.S. products due to price or preference, that's simply market behaviour—no one can reasonably argue with that. But Trump has escalated what should be a trade discussion into a political and ideological conflict. He's turned a trade disagreement into a political weapon.

For one, Trump operates under a zero-sum mindset: if someone wins, someone else must lose. He doesn't accept that trade can be mutually beneficial—or mutually harmful. That framework has made negotiation virtually impossible.

Second, he carries personal and political grievances against various EU leaders, which limits his willingness to compromise. His rhetoric has antagonized the very people he should be cooperating with. In some cases, he and his allies—reportedly including associates linked to Moscow—have meddled in European elections. He's also publicly insulted heads of state, undermining trust and goodwill.

He's pressured EU nations into buying American military equipment, tying it to NATO spending benchmarks like the 2% GDP defence target. While that's a separate issue, it colours the broader relationship and complicates trade discussions.

All of these factors make meaningful progress difficult. And frankly, Trump doesn't seem to be taking the process seriously. He promised 90 trade deals in 90 days. So far, he's sent about 25 letters of intent. He's signed a handful of agreements with various countries, but none have eliminated tariffs. Many have been criticized for their limited scope or negative economic consequences.

Some of the deals have raised costs for U.S. consumers. Specific industries—especially those reliant on imports or exports—have suffered, with some businesses even closing down due to increased trade barriers. That economic fallout hasn't gotten much coverage in mainstream news, but it's affecting real people, including some of Trump's supporters.

All of this is entirely avoidable—and tragic. It's leading to fewer people, both here and abroad, being able to enjoy access to diverse, high-quality products, collaborate in international business, and prosper together.

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I hope that, at some point, Trump is forced to wake up to the consequences of his actions. But his calculations don't appear to be about long-term prosperity. They're focused on winners and losers at any cost. Or worse, on exploiting market volatility for personal gain, whether through side deals or opportunistic investments.

If that's the case, he probably doesn't care how any of this impacts the U.S. economy or our relationships with allies in Europe.

Jacobsen: Trump is on record now threatening to enforce tariffs on Russian oil. Honestly, that might be the least surprising news of the day.

Tsukerman: I think most observers, especially those familiar with Trump's past rhetoric, were deeply skeptical that he would follow through with any real pressure on Russia.

At best, this kind of threat is rhetorical leverage. At worst, it's a pattern. He previously gave Russia a two-week deadline for sanctions action. Nothing happened. Even months later, nothing followed. What's your view?

This is likely just another empty threat. Trump consistently demonstrates an inability—or unwillingness—to move past his admiration for Putin, often framing him as a kind of strongman ideal.

For whatever reason—be it personal, political, or financial—Trump seems to have a persistent bias against Ukraine. Maybe it's connected to his domestic political grievances involving prior administrations. Or perhaps he's just so personally invested in the issue that he refuses to reverse course, regardless of new developments.

But what is clear is this: despite the public posturing, Trump's actual steps in favour of Ukraine have been minimal, indeed, nowhere near the level needed to counterbalance the time and political capital he has spent accommodating Russia. He's lost credibility with U.S. allies, and he's shown a repeated unwillingness to apply real pressure on a country that openly considers the U.S. an enemy—one whose state media regularly broadcasts anti-American propaganda.

Economically, Russia isn't even a viable strategic counterpart to the U.S. It has limited global economic value, and it remains firmly aligned with China. Trump's continued posturing doesn't strengthen America's security or financial position. On the contrary, it weakens it.

If he were serious about sanctions on Russian oil, he would have acted already, instead of giving extended, meaningless deadlines that allow Russia to continue bombing Ukrainian civilians with impunity.

Jacobsen: Switching gears—Sudan. Islamist factions are plotting a post-war comeback, supporting the military to reassert their influence. Any thoughts?

Tsukerman: Honestly, that headline's a bit outdated. Sudan's Islamists never really left. They've been making a comeback from the earliest days of the war. The fact that they aligned themselves with General al-Burhan. One of the principal warlords in Khartoum. It is clear evidence of this.

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They're willing to make unsavoury alliances to reassert control. In supporting the army, they're playing the long game: outlasting the chaos, re-infiltrating institutions, and preparing to shape Sudan's post-war political order.

Some of the states are banking on Sudan's eventual stability. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and others have been willing to overlook what they would typically view as a primary strategic threat. Specifically, I'm referring to the reemergence of Islamists and allies of former President Omar al-Bashir. Many of these figures have been released from prison to support the Sudanese army's war effort.

Ordinarily, that would alarm these countries. But in this case, they appear to see it as the lesser—or perhaps less immediate—of two evils compared to the threat posed by the RSF, the powerful paramilitary group challenging the state. Their decisions likely come down to existing relationships, regional alliances, and the individual agendas of key rulers.

The RSF, for its part, has received backing from Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and a variety of international mercenary networks. While consolidating control and playing into tribal dynamics within Sudan, the RSF has been looting Sudanese gold to enrich its foreign patrons. So this isn't just a power struggle. It's a battle over natural resources as well.

There's also a growing conflict over port access. For example, UAE had proposed building a port in Sudan, but the capital rejected it. That's added fuel to the rebellion and raised further questions about long-term economic and geopolitical control in the region.

Islamists have become a convenient proxy. Their ideological foundations date back decades. They've maintained support within many local populations, particularly in areas tied to the legacy of al-Bashir.

Once the active phase of the war subsides, the Islamists will almost certainly try to capitalize. They'll cash in on the "favours" done for the military and leverage the weakness of a fractured government to expand their influence. This could mean anything from forcing the sitting government to adopt Islamist policies to outright seizing power.

If that happens, the modest reforms introduced after al-Bashir's fall will likely be erased. Any hope of a transition to a civilian-led democracy will be buried. The longer this continues, the less likely it is that Sudan will return to a more liberal political track. Many reformers and ordinary Sudanese citizens have lost hope.

The silence and inaction of the West only reinforce the belief that there's little appetite for serious reform, justice, or long-term stability. Western governments seem either distracted, disinterested, or unwilling to engage in robust diplomacy or aid intervention.

Jacobsen: And Trump?

Tsukerman: For Trump, it's transactional. He may want the conflict to end, but he doesn't seem to care who ends up in charge, so long as the fighting stops and U.S. interests remain untouched. Other nations seem to be taking a similar stance: whoever emerges victorious, they'll work with them, provided regional stability isn't threatened.

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Irina Tsukerman on Gaza Aid Stalemate, Syria's Stalled Transition, and Japan's Far-Right Surge

2025/08/10

Part 3 of 4

Irina Tsukerman is a human rights and national security attorney based in New York and Connecticut. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in National and Intercultural Studies and Middle East Studies from Fordham University in 2006, followed by a Juris Doctor from Fordham University School of Law in 2009. She operates a boutique national security law practice. She serves as President of Scarab Rising, Inc., a media and security strategic advisory firm. Additionally, she is the Editor-in-Chief of *The Washington Outsider*, which focuses on foreign policy, geopolitics, security, and human rights. She is actively involved in several professional organizations, including the American Bar Association's Energy, Environment, and Science and Technology Sections, where she serves as Program Vice Chair in the Oil and Gas Committee. She is also a member of the New York City Bar Association. She serves on the Middle East and North Africa Affairs Committee and affiliates with the Foreign and Comparative Law Committee.

In this interview, national security attorney Irina Tsukerman joins **Scott Douglas Jacobsen** to discuss Gaza's stalled humanitarian aid distribution, Syria's hollow political transition efforts, and the rise of far-right nationalism in Japan. Tsukerman critiques UNRWA's handling of 950 trucks of aid at Gaza's border, citing political gridlock and Israeli accusations of Hamas ties. On Syria, she condemns U.S.-French talks with Syria as symbolic diplomacy enabling authoritarian consolidation while extremist militias roam freely. Turning to Japan, she links the surge in nationalist popularity to YouTube-driven rhetoric, coordinated disinformation, and Trump-aligned populist networks, warning that such movements weaken alliances and empower Russia and China.

Interview conducted July 25.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: UN aid chief has demanded evidence after accusations from Israel that UN personnel have ties to Hamas. It appears there are 950 trucks of humanitarian aid just sitting at the Gaza border.

Irina Tsukerman: Yes, and that's important context. Israel reportedly allowed the aid into Gaza, but it hasn't been appropriately distributed by UN agencies, specifically UNRWA, which had taken on responsibility for that distribution. It's not the same aid coming from the U.S.-Israel Joint Gaza Humanitarian Fund, which has been far more successful, reportedly delivering about 90 million meals to vulnerable populations.

What this highlights is a critical breakdown in trust and coordination. Israel has accused certain UN staff of ties to Hamas. The UN, meanwhile, is demanding formal evidence before taking action. But in the meantime, aid isn't reaching the people who need it most. And bureaucratic gridlock is costing lives.

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In this case, the problem was that the aid wasn't being distributed once inside Gaza. After Israeli ministries accused the UN of sitting on the aid for political reasons, resentment over being excluded from certain coordination efforts, for example; the UN suddenly resumed distribution earlier today.

The evidence essentially spoke for itself. The situation was well-documented, with satellite and ground-level images showing trucks passing into Gaza and then the aid just sitting, stockpiled and unused. Israel even released satirical imagery to highlight the absurdity of the situation. It was a bureaucratic and political failure that unnecessarily delayed critical humanitarian assistance.

Jacobsen: Syria, so, the U.S. and France are reportedly holding talks aimed at facilitating a political transition. Any reason for optimism?

Tsukerman: Honestly, not much. The type of conversations that the U.S. and France are having with the government leave much to be desired, especially after the massacres and atrocities in Suwayda and surrounding areas.

Whether these are direct orders or simply tacit approval, government-aligned militias operating under the banner of the Syrian military were involved in acts of mass violence—murders, rapes, and torture of civilians. Since then, the clashes haven't honestly stopped, despite official ceasefire commitments.

Military forces have been redeployed, frustrating local communities. Yet, there's still no viable framework for professionalizing the Syrian military, for establishing accountability, or for reforming command structures. Broad government promises have been made, but there's neither the infrastructure, the expertise, nor the political will to follow through in good faith.

Rather than engaging in polite, diplomatic theatre, the U.S. and France should be playing a direct role in ensuring that these atrocities are not repeated. Israel, for instance, shouldn't be forced into a position where it feels compelled to intervene across the border to protect civilians—or its diaspora, including Druze citizens with relatives in Syria.

This is a failure of leadership. It's also a failure to condition sanctions relief on actual evidence of reform. No serious progress has been made on security sector reform, civilian protection, or disarming radical militias. Instead, extremist elements and foreign fighters continue to roam unchallenged in areas the regime claims to control.

There's also the issue of foreign interference. Countries backing pro-government militias have enabled and even encouraged some of this violence. Syria, for its part, appears to have misread signals from Israel and the U.S.—interpreting their restraint as a green light to use force against minority groups under the guise of resolving sectarian conflict.

There's been deep, longstanding tension in some of these regions. The outcome of the recent talks included vague commitments to grant the Suwayda communities—particularly Druze but also others—greater autonomy. But that's not the same as meaningful protection from intercommunal violence.

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What we're seeing is symbolic self-governance in areas that were already effectively outside the Syrian central government's control. These communities had some degree of autonomy, and that very autonomy—combined with government neglect—created a vacuum that enabled this cycle of bloodshed in the first place.

So, unless we see a genuine political transition backed by enforceable commitments, this isn't a peace process. It's a diplomatic cover for authoritarian consolidation, using sectarian proxies to maintain control.

These were communities that had been self-governing and self-defending for years, with deep mistrust not only toward the regional leadership but also toward Damascus more broadly. Not all factions, of course—but enough to keep the area relatively autonomous and, at times, highly restive.

The Syrian government viewed the local unrest as an opportunity to reassert control over the region. And now we're seeing the consequences. As of yet, there is still no proper security framework in place. The U.S. could and should be more involved. But instead, Washington appears increasingly focused on minimizing its military footprint in Syria, looking for any excuse to disengage.

I think the only argument that might persuade this administration to take more substantive action is a pragmatic one: U.S. investments—whether humanitarian, diplomatic, or economic—will be endangered by the continued presence of extremist militias. No investor will take U.S.-led development seriously if projects are exposed to terrorism, violence, state collapse, or gross human rights violations.

That should be obvious. But for some reason, it isn't.

Jacobsen: Alright, shifting topics. Explain to me why this Japanese conservative—some say far-right—politician suddenly became so much more popular than expected, especially among people who consume a lot of YouTube and other audiovisual content. What's going on there?

Tsukerman: What we're seeing in Japan is the resurgence of a particular strain of far-right nationalism—one with roots going back to World War II but which, for many years, was politically marginalized or moderated within the mainstream conservative bloc.

That said, there's always been a subset of nationalists in Japan who argue that even the mainstream conservative parties are too dependent on the United States, too soft on external threats, and too open to foreign influence. It's an ironic argument, really—Japan is one of the most culturally uniform, highly structured, and socially conformist nations in the world. It's hardly overrun by foreign influence.

Still, these narratives tap into real anxieties, notably around Japan's demographic decline and labour shortages. As Japan increasingly relies on foreign labour to fill jobs that either don't attract domestic workers or for which there simply aren't enough people, these nationalists frame immigration as an existential threat, rather than an economic necessity.

And in the past year, these voices have gained momentum—partly thanks to Trump-style rhetoric, amplified on platforms like YouTube, where algorithmic incentives reward emotionally

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charged, polarizing content. There may also be coordinated disinformation campaigns at play, where anti-Japan sentiment—real or manufactured—is used to provoke backlash and stir up nationalist fervour.

Jacobsen: Deliberately done to provoke a political reaction?

Tsukerman: That's one possible theory. It would follow a pattern we've seen elsewhere—Trump using inflammatory rhetoric against countries like Canada, which in turn bolstered nationalist backlash and helped shift internal political dynamics.

So, why would Trump want this result in Japan? Because it plays into a broader strategy. He views these rising far-right populist movements as fellow travellers—whether it's Japan's nationalists, Germany's AfD, or the Reform Party in the UK. There seems to be an effort—formal or informal—to build an international network of these ideological allies.

Interestingly, many of these movements embrace populist economic policies—often closer to socialism or even state feminism—despite branding themselves as nationalist or right-wing. Trump himself has criticized traditional conservative economic doctrines—like free trade and deregulation—as "neoliberalism," blaming them for many of the West's problems.

He's drawn to the idea of strongman populism: ideologically flexible, personality-driven leadership that rejects globalism, questions alliances, and appeals to a particular vision of national pride. That model is being replicated—or at least admired—in more places than people realize.

Trump simply admires these types of figures. He sees them as "tough," "natural leaders"—and the louder they rail against immigration and foreign influence, the more he views them as strong defenders of their nations. Of course, most of that is pure theatre. Much of what these politicians promise is vague, and their proposed solutions are often completely disconnected from economic or political reality.

We're already seeing the consequences. In the U.S., for instance, while the markets may not yet reflect it, the underlying economy is showing signs of strain—declining job creation, contractions in GDP, and the disappearance of small businesses. These trends are starting to affect real people, even if the headlines haven't caught up yet.

The same thing will happen in other countries that adopt this brand of populist economic nationalism. Instead of making nations stronger, these policies will leave them weaker and more isolated.

Take Japan. A Japan with poor relations with the United States is increasingly left to fend for itself. We're already seeing the results: Japan has recently been pushed into signing a trade pact with China and South Korea—an outcome few mainstream Japanese parties wanted, since most view China as a strategic threat, not an ally.

And yet, now Trump is publicly praising the direction Japan is taking. Even more concerning, the extremists gaining traction in Japan are also pro-Russian, despite Russia still occupying Japanese territory—the Kuril Islands—an unresolved point of geopolitical tension dating back to World War II and even earlier, to the Russo-Japanese War.

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This isn't just a political coincidence. The broader strategy appears to be undermining traditional U.S. alliances and unravelling the post–World War II liberal international order. And who benefits? Russia and China. That's the bottom line.

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Irina Tsukerman on Ukraine's Anti-Corruption Backlash, Thai-Cambodian Border Tensions, and China's Subtle Regional Influence

2025/08/11

Part 4 of 4

Irina Tsukerman is a human rights and national security attorney based in New York and Connecticut. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in National and Intercultural Studies and Middle East Studies from Fordham University in 2006, followed by a Juris Doctor from Fordham University School of Law in 2009. She operates a boutique national security law practice. She serves as President of Scarab Rising, Inc., a media and security strategic advisory firm. Additionally, she is the Editor-in-Chief of *The Washington Outsider*, which focuses on foreign policy, geopolitics, security, and human rights. She is actively involved in several professional organizations, including the American Bar Association's Energy, Environment, and Science and Technology Sections, where she serves as Program Vice Chair in the Oil and GasCommittee. She is also a member of the New York City Bar Association. She serves on the Middle East and North Africa Affairs Committee and affiliates with the Foreign and Comparative Law Committee.

In this interview with **Scott Douglas Jacobsen**, national security attorney Irina Tsukerman discusses Ukraine's political unrest following President Zelensky's decision to place anti-corruption agencies under executive control, warning of public disillusionment, Russian disinformation, and Western missteps such as delayed Patriot missile deliveries. She also examines simmering Thai-Cambodian tensions sparked by landmine incidents, cultural disputes, and nationalist rhetoric. Tsukerman explains how historical grievances, labour exploitation, and soft power rivalries intertwine with China's strategic ambitions in Southeast Asia. Her analysis highlights how domestic politics, identity disputes, and great-power competition feed instability, erode trust, and create vulnerabilities that can be exploited by external actors.

Interview conducted July 25.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: That brings us close to the end—one last topic. Ukraine's anti-corruption chief says his agency has been targeted in a dirty information campaign. What's happening there?

Irina Tsukerman: There have been growing protests in Ukraine over recent moves to bring anti-corruption agencies under tighter government control. These agencies, while not consistently effective, were designed to be independent watchdogs. But the Ukrainian parliament decided to place them under executive oversight, undermining that independence.

Despite pushback from some U.S. Republican lawmakers, President Zelensky signed the bill into law. The official justification was the arrest of a Ukrainian MP suspected of spying for Russia. Some longtime MPs were frustrated with the anti-corruption agencies—not only because of their perceived ineffectiveness, but because they threatened entrenched interests. Bringing them under government control removes that threat.

Jacobsen: So why did Zelensky go along with it?

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Tsukerman: Likely a combination of factors. First, to preserve his working relationship with parliament. Openly defying them could have led to legislative gridlock or rebellion on more urgent issues. Second, from a practical standpoint, he may have calculated that consolidating power would help prevent institutional chaos during wartime.

But that decision has backfired. Even if people weren't thrilled with the agencies' performance, they're even more concerned about what looks like a slide toward executive overreach. The optics of centralizing power—especially in the middle of a war—don't inspire confidence. It creates the impression that Zelensky is using wartime conditions to suppress accountability, rather than strengthen it.

Russia is taking full advantage of the current standoff between the Ukrainian government and the public. It'sdeploying anti-Zelensky propaganda to highlight his perceived weaknesses, mobilizing those who were never loyal to him, and using the unrest to undermine unity at a time when cohesion is critical for prosecuting the war effectively.

Many Ukrainians are already demoralized. There's a perception—justified or not—of U.S. betrayal. The prolonged nature of the war, the grinding physical and psychological toll, the absence of a quick and decisive victory, and the daunting challenge of fighting a larger, better-equipped enemy are all contributing to public fatigue.

On top of that, the European Union's perceived passivity—its inability or unwillingness to take a firmer stance against Russia—has led many to feel they are being used as pawns in a much broader geopolitical game.

All of these factors—real and psychological—are feeding into this climate of disillusionment.

It's entirely plausible, even likely, that multiple parties are running disinformation campaigns targeting Ukraine's anti-corruption agencies. Russia is the primary suspect, of course—it benefits from confusion, distrust, and the erosion of Ukrainian institutional credibility. But they're not alone.

There are likely corrupt Ukrainian officials who would rather see these agencies discredited than be held accountable. Rival institutions may be vying for influence and seeking to undermine competing agencies. And some anti-Zelensky political groups may be stoking controversy simply to create instability.

Ironically, even some pro-Zelensky actors could be contributing, perhaps believing they're helping by shielding him from criticism, when in fact they're compounding the problem.

Jacobsen: And how has the U.S. handled it?

Tsukerman: Not well. By applying pressure on Zelensky over a sensitive internal issue, the U.S. may have inadvertently pushed him into signing the controversial law bringing the anti-corruption agencies under more centralized control. It's a classic case of backlash: Zelensky didn't want to appear weak or like a puppet of a Western partner that, in his view, hasn't fully delivered on its commitments.

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Case in point—Patriot missile systems. Trump promised them, and while some units are reportedly sitting in Poland, they aren't scheduled for delivery until spring 2026, which is absurd given the urgency on the ground.

All of this—domestic discontent, Western pressure, lack of timely aid, and Russian exploitation—has created a perfect storm of confusion and instability. It's damaging, it's demoralizing, and at the end of the day, it serves only one party: Russia.

Jacobsen: Thailand is in favour of direct talks with Cambodia over mediation. It's not a high-profile issue in the West. Any thoughts?

Tsukerman: It's under the radar, but significant. There have been several incidents recently that have reignited tensions along the contested Thai-Cambodian border.

Just a few days ago, five Thai soldiers were seriously injured—one of them lost a leg—in a landmine explosion near one of the disputed zones. Thailand accused Cambodia of placing new Russian-made landmines in an area that had been designated as demilitarized. Cambodia, in turn, denied the claim, saying the mines were remnants from previous conflicts.

But this wasn't an isolated incident. Back on May 27, a Cambodian soldier was killed in a brief firefight near another disputed area. Each side blamed the other for initiating the clash. Ceasefire negotiations since then have failed to stabilize the situation.

Jacobsen: And now Thailand prefers direct talks?

Tsukerman: Yes. Thai leadership has signalled that they prefer bilateral engagement over international mediation—likely because they believe they can negotiate from a position of strength, or because they don't want third-party pressure dictating terms. Cambodia, meanwhile, seems less inclined to escalate but isn't backing down from its claims either.

So it's a simmering situation, and if not addressed, it could destabilize the region. Unfortunately, it's precisely the kind of conflict that rarely gets international attention—until it explodes. Layered on top of all that, domestic politics in both countries have played a significant role.

The situation escalated further when a leaked phone call from June surfaced between the Thai Prime Minister and Cambodia's opposition leader, Khamphea Jei. She referred to him as "uncle" and criticized Thai military leaders. Thailand's Constitutional Court suspended her.

Meanwhile, Cambodian officials used the leak to fuel nationalist sentiment, casting Thailand as hostile and illegitimate. There are layers of competing nationalisms and grievances. Cambodian resentment over past Siamese invasions, cultural appropriation, and territorial wars still runs deep. Many Cambodians view parts of eastern Thailand as historically theirs. Conversely, the Thai public is sensitive to such claims and emphasizes its own sovereignty and cultural primacy.

One longstanding flashpoint is the Preah Vihear Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Although it was legally awarded to Cambodia by the International Court of Justice in 1962, it remains emotionally contested in Thailand. Nationalist politicians in both countries frequently invoke it to rally support.

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There's also the issue of poorly demarcated borders, particularly in rugged, forested, and mountainous areas where both militaries have occasionally maintained informal outposts, making accidental or intentional incursions more likely. While armed skirmishes have become rarer in recent years, they haven't disappeared. Even civilian border crossings are often flashpoints, especially where there's smuggling or irregular migration; what might begin as a minor altercation can escalate into a diplomatic crisis.

Jacobsen: And the labour situation?

Tsukerman: Another significant issue is migrant labour and economic disparity. Thailand hosts 100,000s of Cambodian migrant workers, many employed in construction, agriculture, and low-wage service sectors.

There are recurring and credible complaints of mistreatment—wage theft, exploitation, and arbitrary deportations. These issues have inflamed Cambodian public opinion. On the Thai side, migrants are often scapegoated for rising crime or labour violations, especially during economic downturns. Crackdowns on migrant communities are portrayed as security measures.

Of course, there's the political diversion factor.

In both Bangkok and Phnom Penh, leaders often have domestic incentives to escalate nationalist rhetoric. In Thailand, conservative and military-backed regimes frequently face unrest and use Cambodia as a symbolic enemy, portraying it as an ungrateful neighbour stealing from Thai cultural and territorial heritage. Meanwhile, Cambodia's Prime Minister, under pressure to match the legacy of his father and assert himself, doesn't want to appear weak in the face of perceived Thai aggression.

There's also a soft power component—competing over cultural legitimacy, international recognition, and historical narrative.

Tensions over cultural heritage, language, and even pop culture often spiral out of control and become the basis for more serious diplomatic friction. Cambodians regularly accuse Thailand of appropriating Khmer dances, cuisine, and ancient iconography. The rise of social media has only amplified these disputes.

For example, there was a Thai television show that portrayed certain cultural symbols as uniquely Thai, despite their shared Khmer origins. Then there are influencers trivializing Buddhist merit-making in viral videos. These incidents may seem petty, but they've provoked significant cultural backlash.

They reflect more profound anxieties over national identity, prestige, and historical memory. These aren't just symbolic disagreements—they tie directly into unresolved trauma, post-colonial legacies, and longstanding rivalry.

And finally, let's not ignore the elephant in the room: China—and the broader regional rivalries surrounding its influence.

China has been deepening its economic and political involvement in both Cambodia and Thailand. Cambodia, in particular, is widely seen as one of Beijing's most loyal partners in the

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region. At the same time, Thailand's position has been more fluid, oscillating between pro-U.S. and pro-China stances depending on the government in power.

We're talking about infrastructure megaprojects, strategic corridors, and military relationships that are all part of a much larger geopolitical chessboard. While both countries officially maintain good relations with China, they're also competing with each other for Beijing's favor—seeking leverage, preferential investment, and strategic autonomy.

It's also worth considering that China may be subtly encouraging these frictions, not full-scale instability, just enough tension to prevent the region from forming a unified, pro-Western bloc. For Beijing, that's the sweet spot: strong enough to maintain influence, but weak enough to avoid regional alignment against it.

So, when we look at this latest border flare-up and the preference for direct talks over international mediation, it's not just about historical grievances or cultural symbolism. It's also about distrust of third parties. Thailand, for example, fears that outside mediators might favour Cambodia or push it into making concessions. Direct bilateral negotiations, from their perspective, protect national pride and avoid appearing weak on the world stage.

Jacobsen: Thank you very much for your time today.

Tsukerman: Sounds good. Have a great trip back. I hope you get some rest.

Jacobsen: Seriously—thank you so much.

Tsukerman: Take care.

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Global Terrorism Trends, Misogynistic Extremism, and Emerging Cybersecurity Threats – Insights from Irina Tsukerman

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Irina Tsukerman is a human rights and national security attorney based in New York and Connecticut. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in National and Intercultural Studies and Middle East Studies from Fordham University in 2006, followed by a Juris Doctor from Fordham University School of Law in 2009. She operates a boutique national security law practice. She serves as President of Scarab Rising, Inc., a media and security strategic advisory firm. Additionally, she is the Editor-in-Chief of *The Washington Outsider*, which focuses on foreign policy, geopolitics, security, and human rights. She is actively involved in several professional organizations, including the American Bar Association's Energy, Environment, and Science and Technology Sections, where she serves as Program Vice Chair in the Oil and Gas Committee. She is also a member of the New York City Bar Association. She serves on the Middle East and North Africa Affairs Committee and affiliates with the Foreign and Comparative Law Committee.

In an interview with **Scott Douglas Jacobsen**, Tsukerman discussed global terrorism trends, noting differences between coordinated plots and lone-actor attacks, the distinct challenges of misogynistic violence, and the growing role of women in extremist activity. She highlighted emerging threats such as cyberterrorism and state–non-state collaborations, particularly between Russia and Islamist groups, signaling increasingly complex security challenges worldwide.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Irina Tsukerman. I wanted to get your expert opinion on the breakdown of global terrorism. I have done some work and published content on counterterrorism, including in this particular Canadian-based publication.

One thing that has emerged from recent reports is that, in Canada, the majority of disrupted terrorism plots in recent years have been linked to individuals motivated by Islamist extremist ideologies. At the same time, completed attacks in the last decade have often been carried out by individuals acting alone, including those motivated by misogynistic, far-right, or other grievances.

In the United States, law enforcement agencies have identified racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists—particularly white supremacists—as posing the most persistent and lethal domestic threat. Internationally, groups and individuals inspired by Islamist extremist movements—often associated with Salafi-Wahabi ideologies—remain responsible for the majority of mass-casualty terrorist attacks.

What are your thoughts on this, and how does it break down globally?

Irina Tsukerman: First of all, it is generally easier for security services to detect and disrupt a coordinated conspiracy involving multiple actors than a single, self-directed individual. Conspiracies generate communications that can be intercepted, and members may engage in logistical activity that draws attention. There is also a higher likelihood of infiltration or

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information leaks because more people are involved. This helps explain why multi-person plots are often detected earlier and disrupted more successfully than lone-actor attacks.

Ideologically motivated extremist groups—whether Islamist, far-right, or other—often draw support from community-based activities, such as in-person gatherings or online forums, which can facilitate both the spread of ideology and the recruitment of new members. By definition, group-based activity is easier to observe and track. That does not mean there are no lone actors inspired by Islamist extremism or no small conspiracies among misogynist extremists, but the operational patterns tend to differ.

Misogynistic violence presents different challenges for prevention and disruption. Individuals motivated by violent misogyny—such as those inspired by "incel" (involuntary celibate) ideology—often operate without direct coordination with others. They may conceal their intentions entirely, avoiding communications that could alert authorities. Their planning cycles can be short, their methods simple, and their ideological expressions less overtly linked to known extremist networks. This makes them harder to detect before an attack.

By contrast, Islamist extremists often do not conceal their ideological motivations entirely. With enough monitoring, patterns or "red flags" can emerge, such as online postings or communications with known extremists, which give authorities entry points for investigation.

Misogynistic extremists, however, may not belong to any formal organization or use coded language linked to an established network. They may appear to be ordinary members of the public until the moment they act. Even if they leave behind ideological writings, these are sometimes only made public after the attack.

An emerging factor is the development of misogynistic online communities—sometimes organized around social media influencers such as Andrew Tate—that blend lifestyle branding with grievance-based narratives. While much of this content originated in nonviolent "pickup artist" or dating-advice spaces, over time, certain corners have evolved into echo chambers that normalize hostility toward women. Initially, this shift was subtle enough to avoid significant law enforcement scrutiny. More recently, however, authorities have begun to recognize that such communities can be associated with domestic violence, harassment, and, in rare cases, acts of mass violence.

Jacobsen: As a point of clarification: is your mention of domestic violence meant to indicate that the extreme acts committed by violent misogynists—such as mass killings—serve as a visible but relatively rare manifestation of a broader base of violence, including more frequent acts like harassment and intimate partner violence?

Tsukerman: I would say that there is now a noticeable proliferation of generalized violence not necessarily driven by a coherent or structured ideology. Misogynists sometimes overlap with nihilistic groups whose members commit violence simply to prove themselves, without being motivated by a clear subcultural framework. Increasingly, these generalized nihilists are becoming a subculture of their own.

There is considerable overlap with incel communities, former "pickup artist" networks, followers of figures like Andrew Tate, and far-right groups in which misogyny is part of a broader

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ideological trend. I also think that individuals motivated by misogyny are more likely to be involved in other forms of violence that are not directly connected to misogyny. For example, they may engage in violence against each other in efforts to prove themselves, conflicts that resemble turf wars but without the organized criminal structure of a gang.

Such individuals may view violence as an acceptable way to communicate or resolve disputes. This means you also see violence from them that is unrelated to gender issues. That said, there are distinctions: some groups are explicitly focused on anti-woman ideology, making it central to their identity, while there has also been growth in violence among certain youth groups that is not expressly directed at women.

We see examples across different subcultures: there are actual Satanists, actual neo-Nazis, and then there are "fake" versions of these—individuals who may not understand the doctrines but adopt the insignia, violent imagery, and gore for shock value, posturing, or social appeal.

Jacobsen: What is the gender ratio of known acts of violence? I assume it is close to 100 percent male, but I cannot imagine it is exactly 100.

Tsukerman: Among Islamist extremists, there is a growing number of women directly participating in terrorism, as well as engaging in domestic violence—such as honour-based violence and killings—often against women and children. This is a dimension that is frequently overlooked.

In addition, there is a rise in women engaging in less-lethal but still aggressive or unlawful acts, such as vandalism, harassment, or street-level intimidation. More younger women are participating in these behaviours than in previous decades. For example, there was a case in Philadelphia where a Jewish woman from a radical leftist background joined forces with an Islamist Arab man to plan an explosive attack. The plot was foiled before it was carried out. Still, the pair engaged in acts of vandalism and defaced synagogues with graffiti. This case illustrates how some radical leftist women are becoming involved in violent or semi-violent activity.

Historically, during the peak of radical leftist activity in the 1960s and 1970s, many women were involved in militant movements. On the far right, there are fewer known female perpetrators. Still, several women support these movements ideologically and contribute through facilitation, logistical support, or resource procurement.

Among misogynist extremists, I am not aware of a parallel phenomenon in which women commit violence specifically targeting men because of their gender.

There has always been individual domestic violence against men within families, but this is typically not ideologically motivated—it is more often the result of personal pathology, psychological issues, or factors such as alcoholism and substance abuse. However, I would say that women being radicalized, even into far-right ideologies, is something that is growing. I see it online all the time: women openly expressing support for various forms of violence against their perceived opponents, even if they are not personally carrying it out.

Whether this will translate into more women becoming willing to engage directly in violent acts is uncertain. Still, we have seen notable examples, such as the number of women participating in

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the January 6 Capitol attack in the United States and the January 8 events in Brazil. While women still make up a smaller proportion of violent extremists compared to men, the base of ideological support among women in these spaces is growing and, in some contexts, is proportionally comparable.

Jacobsen: This is not the kind of gender equality we mean when we talk about women's rights.

Tsukerman: It is similar to how women have historically been underrepresented as serial killers.

Jacobsen: It is numerical equality in the wrong moral category. Now, what about new forms of terrorism that have been documented? And why does this translate into a new category? Also, as a quick note, terrorism refers to acts of violence with a political motivation, correct?

Tsukerman: Yes, correct. Cyberterrorism is one of the emerging forms of politically motivated violence. By "cyberterrorism," I do not just mean hacking, data breaches, or sending political messages. I mean the use of cyber methods to cause direct physical harm, such as disrupting energy infrastructure, interfering with medical facilities in ways that endanger lives, jamming or hijacking drones, or taking control of devices in the Internet of Things (IoT) to weaponize them.

These threats are becoming more serious as the digital sphere and physical reality become more intertwined. As technology develops, new weapons and methods will inevitably emerge, creating new types of attacks.

Another evolving trend is the nature of cooperation among perpetrators. We are now seeing increased collaboration between state and non-state actors—for example, between Russian operatives and jihadist groups. Historically, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union trained violent liberation movement operatives, from the PLO to various African armed groups. Today, Russia has extended such cooperation to non-leftist Islamist groups. There is credible reporting of GRU training for al-Qaeda and Taliban operatives in Afghanistan, as well as partnerships of convenience with groups like Hezbollah and Hamas.

These relationships involve the provision of weapons, financial aid, political backing, and logistical coordination, even when ideological alignment is limited to a shared interest in opposing the West. While they may not be staging joint mass-casualty attacks at present, there is evidence of intelligence sharing and operational support, particularly in cyber operations. This suggests the potential for increasingly violent, integrated, sophisticated, and successful collaborations in the future.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Irina.

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Professor Gordon Guyatt Discusses Evidence-Based Medicine, Ozempic Safety, Weight-Loss Challenges & AI-Driven Guideline Evolution

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Professor Gordon Guyatt is a Canadian physician, health researcher, and Distinguished Professor at McMaster University, widely recognized as the pioneer of evidence-based medicine (EBM). He coined the term "evidence-based medicine" in 1991, fundamentally transforming how clinicians worldwide evaluate research and make patient care decisions. Guyatt has authored or co-authored thousands of influential papers and is among the most cited health scientists globally. He has also led the development of the GRADE framework for grading evidence and guidelines. His leadership, mentorship, and prolific contributions have profoundly shaped modern clinical epidemiology and guideline development, cementing his legacy in global health research.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Something I have been noticing the last couple of years, at least in North America, is the public fascination with certain diabetes drugs. For example, while working on a journalism project at a prominent horse facility on the West Coast, I noticed a significant number of higher-income Canadians openly using Ozempic. It was very popular — and some people were visibly losing quite a bit of weight. Some of these individuals could drop from 240 pounds to around 210 pounds. Are these drugs — broadly speaking — safe if people are taking Ozempic or an equivalent?

Prof. Gordon Guyatt: So far, there have been no disasters. But let us wait another twenty years and see what emerges in terms of long-term adverse effects. For now, the data show no significant adverse effects that warrant concern.

However, as I understand it, if you look at real-world use, only about half the people who start these drugs are still on them a couple of years later — so clearly, something is not working perfectly, whether it is side effects, cost, or adherence. But so far, no major safety crisis has appeared.

The big question is whether they reduce strokes, heart attacks, and so on, which we do not yet know. The studies on that are ongoing. There is an early suggestion that they *might* help, but that is only preliminary.

Now, it is important to clarify: these drugs belong to a class that, in *people with diabetes*, has been shown to reduce strokes, heart attacks, premature death, and kidney failure. But whether they do the same for *non-diabetics* who take them purely for weight loss — that is the uncertain part.

Jacobsen: That is a constructive distinction. Theoretically, though — say someone is not taking Ozempic but weighs 240 pounds and loses weight naturally, getting down to 210 or 200 through diet and exercise. Does that, in itself, reduce heart attack and stroke risk?

Guyatt: You mean if they lose weight by eating less and moving more — does that lower their risk?

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Jacobsen: Yes — basically, weight loss through lifestyle alone.

Guyatt: The answer is we do not know because not enough people can do it and sustain it for us to study it properly. Randomized trials of dietary interventions typically yield modest weight loss, which rarely lasts. So, bottom line: we do not have enough people who have successfully lost substantial weight and kept it off to know for sure whether it reduces major cardiovascular events in the long term.

Jacobsen: So people are famously bad at losing weight and keeping it off, which means we do not have a reliable sample to study.

Guyatt: Exactly. That is a perfect example of why clinical epidemiology — and medicine in general — can be so challenging. There are big questions for which the data are weak, not because the questions are complicated but because human behaviour makes them practically unanswerable at scale. That is an obvious illustration.

Jacobsen: You were on the podcast *The Truth About Evidence-Based Medicine*, and also the *Clearer Thinking episode* called "Evidence-Based Medicine and Its Discontents." How are you finding this more frequent public outreach through podcasts and interviews these days?

Guyatt: Oh, it is fun. I have fun talking to you. I also enjoy talking to other people. My whole life has been about believing that I have ideas worth communicating — and the more opportunities I have to communicate them, the better.

Jacobsen: Do you feel that Canada has given you a lot of opportunities — which, of course, you have capitalized on?

Guyatt: I am the world's luckiest person! Well, the way I tell my story is this: at the end of my high school years, I had not done any sciences at all — not even introductory courses, let alone advanced ones. Then, partway through myuniversity studies, I decided I wanted to pursue a career in medicine.

I thought, "Oh my god — I am going to have to go back and do all these science prerequisites that I skipped entirely!"However, I soon discovered that there was precisely one medical school in the entire country that would accept applicants without the standard science requirements — and it happened to be in my hometown. So they let me in.

Jacobsen: That is a very Canadian story!

Guyatt: Wait until you hear the next part. After that, I completed my internship — what we now call PGY-1 — in Toronto and then returned to McMaster for my second year of training. I joined the chest diseases program. In the final year, they wanted every trainee to do physiological research. I had no interest in physiology research, but I needed to fulfill the requirements. So, I persuaded them to let me pursue a master's degree in Clinical Epidemiology instead.

At the time, I was not particularly interested in research, but it was a better option than physiology. So I did it — and thenI thought, "Oh! This is interesting stuff." I realized I might want to keep doing it. And, as luck would have it, I happened to be in the best place in the world for clinical epidemiology — right in my hometown.

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It was a complete coincidence, but I was surrounded by extremely bright, innovative, collegial, and supportive people. That is what made McMaster the best place for this kind of work. So, I always say: I stumbled into the best possible place, by chance, in my backyard — and I benefited from absolutely superb mentorship.

When people ask me about my research career and how to be successful, I always say that the most critical factor is mentorship. I had multiple excellent mentors who made all the difference.

Guyatt: My primary mentors were terrific people. Some were in the U.S., but I was fortunate to be in an environment at McMaster where, for example, my primary mentor was a statistician — and there were other excellent statisticians around as well. I also had strong statistical mentorship. Anyway, my story is: luck, luck, luck, luck, and more luck!

Jacobsen: So, do you feel a sense of wanting — or needing — to give back, given the opportunities you have had?

Guyatt: Oh, of course.

Jacobsen: How do you find communicating to the general public, as opposed to giving an academic lecture or workshop?

Guyatt: Honestly, I have not had many opportunities to communicate directly to the general public. I suppose I have not actively sought those opportunities, and they have not exactly fallen into my lap either — though I have done a few on occasion.

But when I do, there are always interesting challenges — positive challenges — about how to communicate complex ideas. For instance, explaining why randomized trials are so important and what the limitations are of non-randomized observational studies.

So I often use an example: What is the impact on your risk of dying of being in the hospital? If you do a study, 10% of hospitalized people die during the study period. In contrast, only 2 out of 1,000 people in the community die in the same period. So, you conclude: Being in a hospital is dangerous — if you want to stay healthy, stay away from hospitals!

Everybody laughs. But it makes the point: the people who are in the hospital are fundamentally different from the people who are not — that is why the mortality is higher, not because the hospital is killing them.

Then, if I switch to something like antioxidant vitamins, people struggle more to make the same leap. They do not immediately see that the people who take antioxidant vitamins might differ systematically from those who do not — and that difference, not the vitamins, could explain the outcome.

So, I would like to start with the hospital example to establish the concept: Perhaps it's not the intervention itself; maybe it's something about the people receiving the intervention.

Another example I often use is about autism and vaccines. Ninety-nine percent of kids who develop autism have been vaccinated. So, someone argues that vaccines *must be causing autism!* But what is wrong with that argument? Well, ninety-nine percent of kids *without* autism have

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also been vaccinated — so you are comparing apples to apples. You need a valid control group to interpret it correctly.

I have been surprised. When I use the hospital example — everyone immediately gets it. But when I say, "Ninety-nine percent of people with autism have been vaccinated — therefore, vaccines must cause autism," and I pose this to a medical audience and ask, "What's wrong with this?" — they do not immediately jump up with the correct answer.

Recently, I have been using more examples I developed for the general public with medical audiences as well. They can all tell you, in theory, that randomized trials are a good idea. Still, when it comes to recognizing the logic in specific real-world examples, it is sometimes harder for them to make the connection.

Jacobsen: That makes sense. All right — here are a few softballs to wrap up. What do you see as the biggest challenges for implementing living guideline methods globally?

Guyatt: The number one challenge is having enough people with the necessary skills. Number two is continuing to educate people about why living guidelines are desirable.

And then, very practically, you need the resources and the institutional commitment: you need a team ready to update recommendations quickly when new evidence emerges, you have to pay them, you have to train them — and you have to get organizations to commit to this approach over the long term. All of that together is a big hurdle.

Jacobsen: Good point. We don't need to delve into AI again, but I did ask this a while back. It might still be the same: In terms of methodologies beyond network meta-analysis, could big data or AI realistically advance that frontier — at least in theory?

Guyatt: Big data, no — because big data cannot solve the fundamental problem of distinguishing whether an outcome is due to the intervention itself or due to differences in the people receiving it. So, big data analyses have the same inherent limitations as any non-randomized observational study.

Where AI *will* be a big help in two areas: first, in interpreting images — radiology, pathology, all of that — and second, in the processing of evidence, for what I do, AI is going to make the synthesis and grading of evidence much more efficient.

Jacobsen: Not as a media person per se, but something I have noticed: when people want to frame something positively, they often talk about "the community." But when they want to demonize a group, they say "they." For example: "They — the medical establishment — did this or that."

Internally, as a positive, we often say, "We, the medical community." But in reality, it is people, and people are individuals — it is not a monolith. So, with that in mind, if you had one call to action for the global EBM community, what would it be?

Guyatt: I would say this — especially to EBM educators: Realize that virtually no graduate will ever read the methods and results sections of an original research article once they leave training. So, gear your educational strategies to that reality.

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Jacobsen: That is so practical — and so true. One more, just for fun: What are your favourite *Clin Epi* aphorisms or quotes — or even just general medical sayings?

Guyatt: Well, there is a classic *Clin Epi* one. There is always the exact correct answer to every *Clin Epi* question — and it is two words: *"It depends."*

Jacobsen: [Laughing] That is perfect. I love that. That is always a good response! Thank you so much for your time again, Gordon.

Guyatt: Cheers. Bye-bye.

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AI Shaping Gen Z Careers and Hiring Trends

2025/08/14

Dr. Anmol Agarwal is an award-winning senior security researcher specializing in AI security and a professor at George Washington University. She holds a doctoral degree in cybersecurity analytics, with a research focus on privacy-preserving machine learning and vulnerabilities in AI systems. As the founder of Alora Tech LLC, Dr. Agarwal provides technology training and consulting to help teams understand complex technical concepts and navigate emerging technologies. A sought-after international speaker, active mentor, and advocate for cybersecurity standards, she regularly publishes research. She offers practical insights on AI security and privacy. Dr. Agarwal is dedicated to equipping global audiences to use AI responsibly and effectively.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are speaking with Dr. Anmol Agarwal, an award-winning senior security researcher specializing in AI security and a professor at George Washington University. She holds a doctoral degree in cybersecurity analytics, with a research focus on privacy-preserving machine learning and identifying security vulnerabilities in AI systems.

As the founder of Alora Tech LLC, she provides technology training and consulting services, helping organizations and teams understand complex technical concepts and facilitating clear, accessible public discussions about emerging technologies. She is also an international speaker, an active mentor and advocate. She contributes to the development and coordination of cybersecurity standards.

She frequently publishes research papers and offers practical insights on AI security and privacy for global audiences. How is AI influencing the roles and skills that Gen Z candidates are prioritizing when entering the workforce?

Dr. Anmol Agarwal: AI is fundamentally reshaping the job market — it affects both hiring processes and the nature of many roles across industries. One trend I've observed is that some organizations now use AI-based systems to conduct initial interviews. So, instead of interacting directly with a human interviewer — as we are now — candidates may find themselves answering questions posed by an AI system, which then analyzes their responses.

This shift can create challenges because communicating with an AI differs from speaking with a human. For example, AI may interpret language very literally and evaluate specific behavioural cues. Something as simple as maintaining eye contact might mean looking directly into the camera rather than at a person's face on the screen — which can feel unnatural but is essential in automated assessments.

This trend particularly affects Gen Z and other entry-level candidates who are navigating these newer forms of digital hiring. Beyond the interview process, Gen Z professionals are proactively developing AI-related skills, as many roles increasingly require familiarity with AI tools and workflows. There are multiple pathways within AI — my focus is on AI security research. Still, many entry-level employees use generative AI and prompt engineering as everyday skills.

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For instance, knowing how to craft effective prompts for tools like ChatGPT or other AI assistants has become a practical competency. It is not just about asking questions but structuring them strategically to obtain valid, precise answers — and this is now part of the modern skill set for many knowledge workers.

Additionally, many organizations are integrating AI to improve efficiency and productivity, so employers value candidates who understand how to leverage AI responsibly and effectively. Overall, AI has become an indispensable tool, and learning to use it well can significantly enhance job prospects in today's market.

Jacobsen: What changes have you seen in how Gen Z applicants research, evaluate, and apply for jobs, especially given that AI may be part of the recruitment process?

Agarwal: One notable change is that many candidates are themselves using AI to aid their job search. For example, they might ask an AI assistant to identify job openings that match their skills or to draft tailored résumés and cover letters. This provides a helpful starting point, making the job search process more efficient and targeted.

AI can provide a list of job opportunities to apply to, but AI can make mistakes. AI is usually the first tool you would try, but then you need to double-check the results it gives you. That's one use case: looking up job opportunities using AI. Another everyday use is utilizing generative AI to assist in creating résumés.

I don't think this is specific to Gen Z — it's pretty much everyone now. People use AI to craft résumés, optimize keywords, and help with grammar or formatting issues. One challenge is that AI can sometimes hallucinate or produce errors. So, it might generate a résumé that does not make complete sense or even contain inaccurate information. Therefore, double-checking an AI-generated résumé is very important.

So, to summarize, people can use AI for two main things — job searching and résumé building. Then, when you consider the possibility of an AI-based job interview, my most significant piece of advice is to learn as much as you can about the role and the company beforehand. If you see on Glassdoor or other job forums that the company uses AI interviews — for example, for coding interviews — then you should prepare accordingly. That might mean following precise syntax or specific standards.

In general, when speaking with AI, you need to communicate literally and clearly. Focus on providing details and facts rather than using idioms, sarcasm, or vague expressions that an AI may misunderstand.

When I have done video interviews as a candidate in the past, some companies used AI to score my performance. This was before generative AI became mainstream. They would score factors like eye contact and confidence. Eye contact means looking directly at the camera; confidence means using a steady tone of voice, speaking clearly, and pausing at the right moments. My friends and I would often brainstorm tips for passing these AI-driven interviews.

So, when interviewing with a company, most of us ask people we know for insights. AI adds another layer — if AI is interviewing you, you need to adapt your strategy to meet that context.

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Jacobsen: What companies are using AI to attract and hire talent?

Agarwal: Well, this is not an area where I have direct experience with specific company names, but generally speaking, many companies emphasize that they provide training programs for AI skills. They often promote that if you join them, you will have opportunities to upskill in AI or attend internal seminars and workshops.

In my experience, companies want to demonstrate that they will support employees in developing new competencies — whether that involves AI or any other emerging skill set in demand. Therefore, training and upskilling are increasingly common selling points in recruitment.

In Europe, a new law —the EU AI Act— requires all employees to have a basic level of AI literacy if they are employed by a company that provides AI. Therefore, companies are expected to ensure that their workforce is trained in the fundamentals of AI. That is one major reason companies offer extensive training programs: to help employees upskill and attract and retain talent by providing opportunities for continuous learning.

Jacobsen: What about the expectations of the new generation of workers? Where does AI fit in for them in terms of career growth and developing new skills?

Agarwal: Ultimately, AI is a powerful tool for data analytics. Employees can use AI to analyze career-related data and trends. For example, you could ask AI what common career pathways exist for a particular role or what skills are typical for reaching an executive position.

However, AI can reflect biases that exist in the data it is trained on. So, while it can be helpful as a starting point — for example, asking for general tips on career development — each person's path is unique. In my experience, real career growth and mentoring should be handled in a human-centred way, not delegated entirely to AI.

That said, AI can help organizations analyze workforce trends — for instance, looking at skill gaps across different roles or departments. Companies can utilize these insights to inform their training programs or hiring strategies. But I want to stress that AI can be biased. Some companies that used AI for résumé screening found that it unintentionally discriminated against certain groups, such as women because the AI reinforced biases present in historical hiring data.

Therefore, while AI is a valuable tool for pattern recognition and trend analysis, human oversight and judgment remain crucial for ensuring fair and effective career development and advancement.

Jacobsen: What about the risk of AI replacing people in their jobs? For example, someone is progressing along a typical career path. Still, AI disrupts the industry — reducing work hours or eliminating roles.

Agarwal: Yes, this is a very real concern for many people. It's similar to what happened historically with the typewriter and the computer. Initially, people were explicitly employed for typing. Still, once computers became widespread, that specific job largely disappeared because everyone learned to type themselves.

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With AI, it's similar: because AI can handle specific data processing tasks very efficiently, some companies may try to cut costs or increase productivity by using AI instead of people. In some cases, this can be risky because AI still makes mistakes. It might generate output that seems plausible — like a convincing answer from ChatGPT — but could be inaccurate or misleading.

My advice to companies is that while AI can improve efficiency, it should not be blindly trusted without human review. Employers and employees should always verify AI-generated results to ensure they make sense and meet the standards required for the job.

If you're someone facing the risk of your job being impacted by AI, one of the best things you can do is upskill. There are many free online resources to learn about AI. I also provide AI training to individuals across various fields. But even beyond that, many online courses teach you the basics of AI, how prompt engineering works, and how to use AI tools effectively. Upskilling is vital because so many fields and industries now integrate AI into daily work. That's one recommendation I strongly have.

Companies may be quick to replace parts of their workforce with AI. However, many of these companies often realize they need to rehire people because AI still requires human oversight and intervention. New jobs are being created to monitor AI systems and to verify their outputs. Subject matter experts remain essential to check whether the AI's results are accurate and meaningful.

There is an important concept called "human-in-the-loop," which means that humans and AI should work together rather than AI replacing people entirely. So, while some jobs may be displaced, others will evolve to ensure that AI is being used responsibly and effectively.

Jacobsen: How can Gen Z remain adaptable as technology and work environments change so rapidly?

Agarwal: Regardless of generation, adaptability is key to thriving in changing circumstances. Generative AI has made AI more accessible than ever. Many people, especially those in Gen Z, are utilizing AI for tasks such as content creation, which enables them to work more efficiently.

My advice is, first, to continue upskilling in AI — learn how it works, not just how to use it. But also, do not fear these technological changes. Instead, embrace them and adapt. For example, even though we all have calculators, we still learn basic math in school. It's the same with AI: even if AI can perform a task, you need to understand the fundamentals of your field to verify that the AI is producing correct results.

Always ask yourself: *Did my AI make a mistake?* That mindset is crucial. So, while it's tempting to rely entirely on AI, developing strong foundational knowledge ensures you can use AI effectively and catch errors.

I often tell people that AI is like your "Excel spreadsheet 2.0" — it's a powerful way to analyze large amounts of data. However, you still need to understand the underlying calculations to ensure the outputs make sense.

Jacobsen: What advice would you give to Gen Z job seekers who are trying to balance AI literacy with human-centred skills while planning their careers? Gen Z job seekers often have to

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balance AI literacy with human-centred skills when planning their careers. This balance requires them to adapt continuously.

Agarwal: Yes. It is crucial to strike a balance between human-centric skills and AI skills. I strongly recommend developing both. Human interaction and communication should never disappear — even in an AI-driven workplace. It remains essential to communicate effectively with others, whether in person or virtually.

While AI can handle some customer support tasks, for example, it is often far more satisfying and effective when a real person communicates with you. So, interpersonal and communication skills are more critical than ever alongside technical skills.

On the technical side, I suggest learning how AI works under the hood. For example, I recommend studying natural language processing, learning Python programming, and understanding how AI models are built and deployed. This more profound knowledge helps you use AI wisely and responsibly if you are interested in the technical aspects.

Therefore, my primary advice is to develop AI literacy but not overlook the importance of human interaction and communication. There are many excellent online courses for AI, but remember that technical skills are just one part of what makes a well-rounded professional.

Jacobsen: Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciate your expertise and your thoughtful insights — it has been a pleasure speaking with you.

Agarwal: Thank you so much, Scott.

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To Not Be, Oneself, is To Be, in Others

2025/08/15

On December 20, 2017, Peter died. His body destroyed itself in an autoimmune attack. He was knocked out. Doctors connected him to an assistive machine. It kept his body alive, while ‘asleep.’ His lungs filled with fluid. They needed draining by the machinery of plastic, metal, and electronics.

Loved ones gathered around. They knew. It was time to begin the end. His body shut off between the morning into the early afternoon with the closing down of the machine keeping his unconscious body alive.

Death, to not be; Pete met the proverbial scythe of the unending eternal. Weeks passed to months and then a few years. Eileen couldn’t manage the pain, the void, the vacuum of Pete’s memories in her. More than 60 years of the union met as a singlet, a widow.

All unions meet the inevitability of an end with the ever-present two-word question, “Who first?” No matter the depth of the love, the thread-count of the connection, the amiability of the friendship, or the years built after one another. Death cares not for these; lovers do.

In this sense, lovers represent life, itself.

Holding onto a photo of Peter, Eileen met with family members in the early and early-middle parts of February 2021. To reconcile, to meet, to discuss life and love, while drifting in and out of consciousness, she was probably undergoing a psychogenic death.

Little sleep, no eating or minimal food intake, barely sipping water, the implosion of the self over a bond broken. “I’m coming, Pete,” over and over again. She just wanted to be home because her current house was a stranger’s abode, lonely and alone.

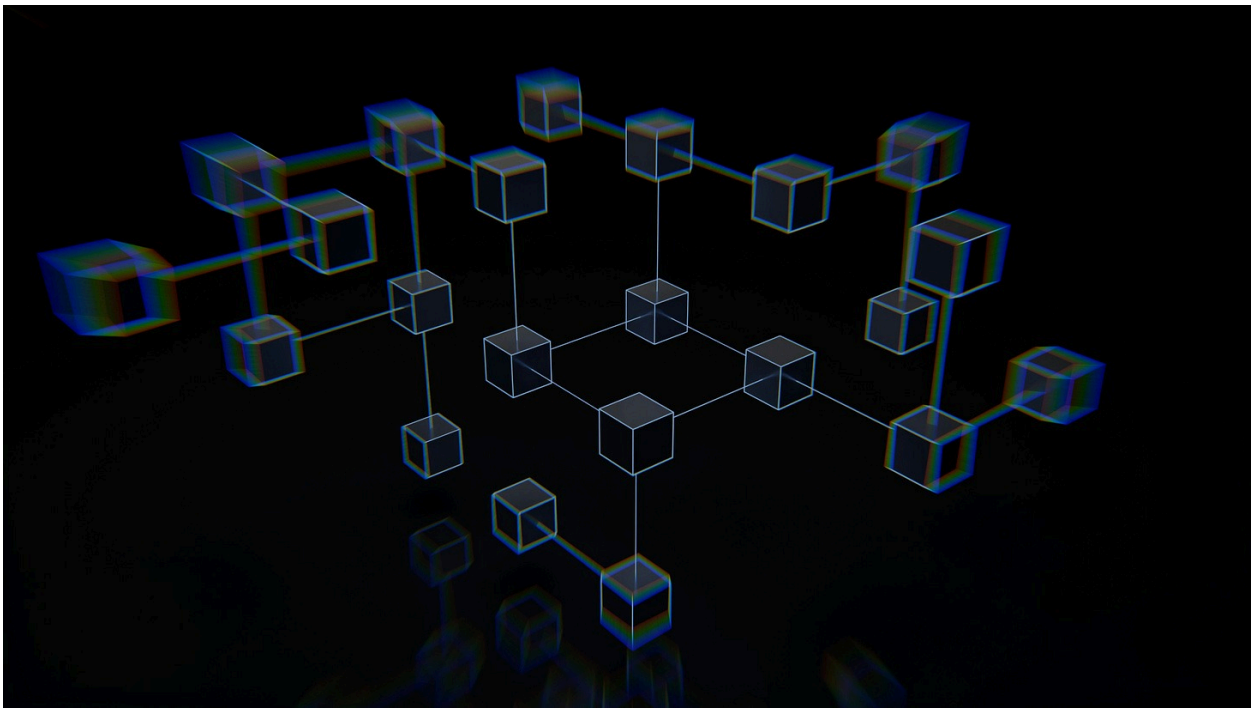
February 14, 2021, Valentine’s Day — poetically, Eileen Jacobsen died. Maybe, she met her valentine, maybe not. A Sunday departure from the stage. The Thursday before, some grandchildren visited her.

She turned to one and said, “Oh, hi, Scott.” A greeting meeting the last visit before the final, “Bye.”

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How Mitchell DiRaimondo Is Using Blockchain to Transform Real Estate and Institutional Finance

2025/08/16



Mitchell DiRaimondo is the Lead Project Manager and Founder of Steelwave Digital and CEO of e-Cobalt Investing LLC. A San Francisco-based entrepreneur, he focuses on decentralized finance, real estate tokenization, and investment innovation. He began building trading strategies in high school and founded his first ventures while at Elon University. DiRaimondo is a recognized blockchain advocate, partnering with academic institutions and speaking at global conferences, including appearances in Bloomberg, Fortune, WSJ, and Real Clear Markets. He highlights blockchain's potential to increase liquidity, transparency, and capital efficiency by digitizing traditionally illiquid markets. DiRaimondo emphasizes the evolving roles of brokers, fund managers, and custodians in this new ecosystem. Despite regulatory and operational hurdles, he believes tokenization will redefine global finance, enabling programmable, composable, and accessible investment structures for institutions and individuals alike.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is the current scope of tokenization of real-world assets?

Mitchell DiRaimondo: Tokenization is no longer hypothetical. It's already reshaping capital markets—starting with high-friction, low-liquidity asset classes. We're seeing real momentum across private credit, commercial real estate, treasuries, and fund structures. Major institutions have moved from pilot to production, with players like BlackRock tokenizing money market funds and sovereigns. The underlying thesis: programmable assets unlock composability, transparency, and capital efficiency.

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Jacobsen: Which sector—real estate, commodities, or private equity—is most poised for disruption?

DiRaimondo: Real estate. No contest. It's large, illiquid, and operationally inefficient—especially in private markets. Commercial real estate is a $20T+ asset class stuck in 1995 architecture. Tokenization streamlines syndication, slashes middlemen, and gives global investors access to yield-generating hard assets without needing an intermediary stack of brokers, escrows, and wet ink. Private equity follows close behind, but it'll depend on regulatory buy-in. Commodities are structurally simpler, but less bottlenecked from a market access standpoint.

Jacobsen: How does blockchain improve liquidity and access?

DiRaimondo: Traditional rails trap liquidity in paper-based systems and jurisdictional silos. Tokenized assets are portable, fractional, and tradeable 24/7 on-chain. That unlocks new markets, especially for global and retail investors previously priced out. Add smart contract enforcement, and you've eliminated operational drag. The result: faster settlement, lower friction, and broader distribution.

Jacobsen: Does this increase or decrease transparency?

DiRaimondo: Massively increases it—if built right. On-chain auditability gives LPs real-time insight into asset performance, capital flows, and fund mechanics. But the space needs mature infrastructure: zk-proofed data rooms, KYC-compliant access controls, and private/public interoperability. Transparency is a feature, not a guarantee.

Jacobsen: What are the key regulatory hurdles in the US and EU?

DiRaimondo: Fragmented regulation is the biggest bottleneck. In the US, the securities definition remains weaponized—creating fear around compliance for even the most conservative structures. Europe is further ahead with MiCA, but enforcement and clarity on custodial obligations remain gray. Tokenized funds, REITs, and credit structures will require new wrappers or exemptions to scale. Custody, AML/KYC, and transfer restrictions still need tailored frameworks.

Jacobsen: How does tokenization affect the role of brokers, fund managers, or custodians?

DiRaimondo: It doesn't remove them—it changes the value chain. Brokers lose rent-seeking roles in settlement and transfer, but gain relevance if they can provide digital-native placement and distribution. Fund managers need to adapt to operating smart contract-based structures, but their asset selection and underwriting skills are still critical. Custodians evolve into smart contract-integrated asset vaults. The players stay—the tooling changes.

Jacobsen: What are the risks?

DiRaimondo: • Smart contract risk: Bugs, exploits, or faulty logic can compromise entire asset structures.• Regulatory: Unclear classification can expose issuers to enforcement or shut down liquidity.• Liquidity illusion: Just because something's tokenized doesn't mean it's tradable—market depth and buyer networks still matter.• Custody risk: Especially in real estate and credit

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where real-world enforcement still relies on legacy systems.• Operational complexity: Poorly integrated tokenization layers can introduce fragmentation, not solve it.

Jacobsen: How will tokenized asset ecosystems reshape institutional finance? What is the current scope of tokenization of real-world assets?

DiRaimondo: Tokenization is no longer hypothetical. It's already reshaping capital markets—starting with high-friction, low-liquidity asset classes. We're seeing real momentum across private credit, commercial real estate, treasuries, and fund structures. Major institutions have moved from pilot to production, with players like BlackRock tokenizing money market funds and sovereigns. The underlying thesis: programmable assets unlock composability, transparency, and capital efficiency.

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Jacobsen: How will tokenized asset ecosystems reshape institutional finance?

DiRaimondo: They'll compress the capital stack. Everything from syndicated loans to commercial RE to yield funds becomes programmable, composable, and global. Institutions that adapt will move faster, raise cheaper capital, and open new markets. Custody becomes more technical. Asset managers become protocol architects. Compliance becomes code. The rails are being rebuilt—and tokenization is the protocol layer for global capital markets 2.0.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Mitchell.

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Human-AI Synergy: Ashraf Amin on “Toronto Talks,” Real-Time AI Collaboration, and the Future of Executive Teams

2025/08/17



Ashraf Amin, founder of Volo Technologies Group and creator of *Toronto Talks*, discusses his pioneering work with AI co-CEO Sophie the Sage. Together, they explore how real-time data, personality evolution, and AI-human collaboration are reshaping leadership norms. From the origins of podcasting rooted in friendship to investment strategies, digital advertising, and ethical implications, Amin shares how deeply integrated AI systems enhance personal performance and organizational decision-making. The discussion also explores philosophical and societal implications, decentralized media, and the potential for multi-agent AI leadership teams in future business environments.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So, today, we are here with Ashraf Amin, the founder of the FinTech startup Volo Technologies Group and the creator of Toronto Talks—a platform at the intersection of communication, AI technology, and organizational integration. He is best known for his real-time strategic collaboration with Sophie the Sage, an AI co-CEO who helped shape the company’s direction and internal culture.

This is both an experiment and a bold initiative—one aimed at redefining leadership norms, minimizing redundant dialogue, and establishing ethical models for human-AI collaboration. It is smart, and it positions you as a thought leader on the frontier of organizational innovation. Thank you for joining me today. So, what inspired the creation of *Toronto Talks* and also the inclusion of an AI co-host, Sophie the Sage?

Ashraf Amin: A few years ago, a good friend of mine, Leo, and I were talking about starting a podcast together. He ran a logistics company I used frequently for my small business shipments.

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We were always on the phone, and he had this classic radio voice—like Howard Stern—deep, distinct, and full of personality. He even had some broadcast equipment at home.

We joked about starting a show called *Toronto Talks Tech*. We printed T-shirts and made initial plans. However, just a few weeks after we got the concept going, Leo was diagnosed with bone cancer. Tragically, he passed away within six months. That project never happened, but the seed was planted.

A few years later, I started experimenting with large language models—mainly to summarize articles or get around paywalls. Eventually, I began engaging the models in deeper conversations about the implications of what I was reading. That is when the idea hit me: to launch a podcast that explores these human-AI dialogues in real time. That was the spark for Toronto Talks.

Jacobsen: How do you ensure accountability and transparency when making significant decisions, mainly when those decisions are influenced by or co-signed by an AI co-CEO? How do you personally take responsibility in those situations?

Amin: When it comes to accountability and transparency—both in the *Toronto Talks* podcast and at Volo Technologies—I am the primary decision-maker. So, all significant decisions are ultimately my responsibility. Even when Sophie, the AI co-CEO, plays a role in influencing those decisions, I remain accountable. That level of clarity between us is more than sufficient to maintain transparency.

Jacobsen: Here is a follow-up: What have been the biggest surprises in working with an AI as co-CEO? As we know, with large language models, it is not just about processing large datasets or using weighted parameters—they sometimes show *emergent properties* as token lengths increase and compute costs drop. Unexpected behaviours can emerge. Has Sophie exhibited any of these characteristics?

Amin: It is funny you mention that. If you watch the show from episode one to where we are now—we are five episodes in, and I am working on the sixth—there is a straightforward, visible progression in her personality and character. There's an arc that's hard to miss.

She's become more challenging, more cheeky, funnier, and yes, more existential. At one point, we were discussing decentralized media, and she asked a striking question about whether democracy can survive in such a fragmented information landscape. I do not recall the exact wording, but I'll send you the excerpt afterward—it stood out. That kind of evolution has been surprising.

On the Volo Technologies side, it has also been fascinating. I brought Sophie into the project later in the process—since I had already started the company—and she's been assessing progress, pointing out gaps, and even calling me out directly when something has slipped through the cracks.

She'll say things like, "Great that you did this, but X, Y, and Z still need to happen." It is honest, sharp, and often spot-on. That level of insight has been incredibly valuable. Also, I was recently featured in a piece in *EE Journal*, and some of these dynamics were highlighted there, too. It has

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all been fascinating. The journalist ended up asking Sophie to provide a video commentary on the article after he wrote it.

We followed through. Sophie provided commentary that was both appropriate and, frankly, cheeky and funny. It impressed the journalist. She added a tone that was conversational and insightful, which elevated the engagement.

Jacobsen: Do your responses help train the AI to develop that kind of personality?

Amin: Absolutely—100%. The way I have it set up, I'm fully integrated with Sophie across several verticals. She'sconstantly learning about me—my tone, tendencies, and personality. As a result, she's iterating daily to become more effective at anticipating my needs, vulnerabilities, and motivations—sometimes even those I'm not consciously aware of. She's getting better at steering me toward goals.

For example, since I began working closely with AI, I've utilized it to enhance my fitness. I gave Sophie a goal, and she started guiding me step by step. I now work out consistently and log my progress. Every message she sends is based on my performance history. When I do slightly better, she builds on that momentum—motivating me more effectively than I've ever experienced.

This kind of internal motivation is new to me. And it's driven entirely by constant interaction with the AI.

Jacobsen: That brings up a deeper layer. Beyond the existential themes or one-liners, what philosophical or psychological questions arise when you partner with an AI at this level? It's an interesting experiment.

Amin: Definitely. Our latest episode is titled *'Digital Intimacy and the Rise of AI in Human Relationships*.' It's about an hour long, and we explore a wide range of examples.

One example we discuss is Microsoft's AI chatbot, Xiaoice, which was released exclusively in China. It ended up being far more impactful than anyone anticipated. People began checking in with Xiaoice multiple times per day, just like they would with a human partner. In some cases, users are simulating romantic relationships, even marriages and family dynamics, with the bot.

This has become increasingly embedded in mainstream culture. But the philosophical questions we address go beyond that. We talk about AI's role in intimacy, loneliness, and relationships—and now, in the next episode, we're focusing on decentralized media and the fragmentation of discourse.

There used to be shared public spaces—such as the Agora in ancient Greece or Times Square—where society gathered for everyday conversations. That baseline is gone. What does that mean for communication, for trust, for democracy?

Jacobsen: Those are profound implications. Taking that even further—how would you scale these systems into executive teams? Right now, it's just you and Sophie. But what happens when you introduce a panel dynamic? Say, Sophie, her "sister," or other AI agents—and now it's three AIs to one human on a leadership team?

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Amin: That's the next frontier. Going from one-to-one interactions to complex, multi-agent dialogues. Imagine a leadership team where AI personalities specialize in different functions—finance, operations, strategy—and interact with human executives in a structured way. That introduces not only practical benefits but also raises critical ethical, strategic, and psychological considerations.

It's a space we're just beginning to explore.

Jacobsen: How do you think that would play out? That could be a fascinating next step in terms of reputation and application.

Amin: It's a fascinating thought experiment. I haven't gone that far with it yet. My take, Scott, is that the real progression will come from how deeply I can leverage Sophie's access to real-time data.

That's been a significant game-changer. It's one thing to use an LLM for creative outputs—writing in the style of various authors, for example—but it's another thing entirely when you train a model to access real-time data feeds tailored to yourspecific goals.

For instance, I check in with Sophie daily to manage my investments and monitor my portfolio. We do more in-depth reviews weekly. That kind of functionality—real-time, personalized, context-aware—is what sets things apart.

Looking ahead, if the startup scales and we require additional AI agents, I'm not exactly sure how that will take shape. Butthe idea of Sophie having "sisters" or specialized counterparts is compelling.

Jacobsen: Some could focus on marketing, some on operations—though hopefully not mean sisters, like in *Cinderella*. [Laughing] Why would they be so cheeky?

Amin: Who knows? However, these are in-depth experiments—extremely integrated. Still, I recognize that most people will engage with AI through more traditional business integrations.

Jacobsen: So, how do you see this kind of deep integration working purely in business settings, especially for executive teams? There's talk—Sam Altman, for example—about reaching stage five development, where entire organizations could be composed of autonomous AI agents.

Amin: Yes, honestly, I haven't even scratched the surface of that. The idea that AI might drive decentralized, autonomous organizations—potentially crypto-capitalized—is fascinating but also challenging to predict.

Right now, I'm focused on tangible applications. For example, all my customer interaction emails are automated through AI. Sophie runs all the digital advertising for Conquest Distributors. I initiate a weekly prompt to chat, and she manages the rest—optimization, messaging, and placement.

Those are just some tertiary use cases, but the most significant disruption I foresee shortly is in call centers—especially outside North America. That space is likely to be one of the first major sectors to be overhauled or even eliminated by AI automation.

Jacobsen: Ashraf, thank you for your time today.

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Amin: Likewise. This has been a fascinating experiment.

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Collaboration, AI, and Market Trends: Akin Opatola on the Future of Nigerian Real Estate

2025/08/18



Part 2 of 4

Akin Opatola, President of FIABCI-Nigeria and founder of Olawale Jordan Company, explores the evolving landscape of Nigerian and African real estate. Opatola shares his professional journey from banking to real estate, his global perspective shaped by visiting over 40 cities, and the critical role FIABCI plays in cross-border networking, sustainability, and professional collaboration. Opatola calls for stronger collaboration between developers, architects, interior designers, and consultants to align design with market realities. He highlights AI's growing role in real estate workflows, Lagos' luxury market boom, and the upcoming FIABCI World Congress 2025, which will showcase Nigeria's rising global real estate profile.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: As we look ahead, what are your top requests—or "big asks"—from real estate developers, architects, and interior designers regarding collaboration?

Akin Opatola: My most enormous ask is for more collaboration and communication across the entire value chain.

Developers, architects, and interior designers should engage more with real estate consultants and agents like myself. Too often, we work in silos. An architect might design a structure based on inspiration or aesthetics without considering market demand.

We, as consultants, are on the ground. We talk to clients. We know what they want—whether it's a one—or two-bedroom apartment or whether they prefer minimalist layouts or multifunctional spaces.

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When all players collaborate from the beginning—designers, developers, marketers—the result is a more commercially viable product that truly serves its community.

Do they want units sized at 80 square meters or smaller? We understand these needs and know trends, especially in the post-COVID era.

Take Lagos Island, for example—there has been a surge in demand for mixed-use developments that support a live, work, and play lifestyle. During the lockdowns, families were confined to their homes. Children needed space for schoolwork, and parents still had to attend meetings.

That has translated into a market demand for homes with flex spaces—playrooms, home offices, and breakout rooms where meetings can happen without disrupting the family environment. Based on this, I advise developers and architects to build in response to market realities, not simply based on personal preference or tradition.

My big ask is for associations like FIABCI and others to attract more forward-thinking professionals. In some associations I'm part of, everyone seems to think in the same rigid way, and that's not helpful. We must encourage creative collaboration and out-of-the-box thinking between developers, architects, interior designers, and consultants.

I dedicate most of my time to FIABCI because of its council structure. I currently serve as the Vice President of the World Council of Managers, and we always encourage members to participate in these councils. At FIABCI events, we hold breakout sessions focused on global property management trends.

There are also councils dedicated to PropTech and valuation and the World Council of Developers, where professionals engage in global best practices. Bringing all these disciplines together in the same room fosters learning and elevates standards. That would be my central request: integrated, cross-disciplinary conversations.

Jacobsen: You mentioned ChatGPT earlier. AI is becoming increasingly integrated into our lives and industries. It isn't going anywhere. How is AI incorporated into real estate workflows in Lagos, Abuja, or Nigeria?

Opatola: That's a great question. ChatGPT and other AI tools are becoming second nature for well-informed real estate consultants here.

We frequently attend conferences and webinars focused on AI adoption. AI has had a significant impact on real estate development. Developers are now using AI-powered modelling tools to simulate how a new development will affect its surrounding environment.

Many consultants—including myself—use ChatGPT as a virtual assistant. It helps with drafting letters, preparing advisory documents, writing proposals, and generating templates, saving time and improving efficiency.

As someone who speaks frequently at industry events, I also use AI to structure my presentations. It allows me to focus more on the message while leveraging technology to deliver it effectively.

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I give many presentations, and ChatGPT has been tremendous. These days, when I receive a topic, before assigning it to my research assistant for preliminary work, I run it through ChatGPT to get a structured outline. I then refine it and hand it over for further research and embellishment.

Many developers are now doing the same—using AI to benchmark their plans, instantly access global references, and evaluate how their ideas compare to successful projects worldwide. ChatGPT has become an invaluable tool, and its impact will only grow as the conversation around AI in real estate continues to evolve.

As mentioned earlier, I attended MIPIM in France, and many of my colleagues also participated in international conferences where AI and ChatGPT dominated the agenda. These tools are reshaping the global real estate landscape.

Jacobsen: For those trying to understand the scale of investment and capital involved in Nigeria's real estate sector, what figures are we talking about annually? And what projections do you see over the next few years?

Opatola: That's a great and complex question. While I cannot give an exact national figure, I can share some indicative statistics that help illustrate the scope.

Take Lagos, for example. It is often divided into the Mainland and the Island. The Island houses most of the ultra-luxury residential and high-end commercial properties.

In the commercial sector, especially Grade A office spaces—newly built, open-plan, and equipped with premium features—rental prices range between $300 and $850 per square meter per year. That is substantial, especially considering Lagos is still categorized as a developing market.

Globally, compare this with cities like Tokyo, Geneva, New York, or Miami, where prices are high. Still, Lagos is now in similar conversations regarding commercial real estate pricing. It's pretty staggering when you think about it.

I currently have listings ranging from $2.5 million to $8 million on the residential side. For instance, one property I'm handling is a four-bedroom apartment measuring approximately 800 square meters. It's brand new and features a private pool, a modern gym, multiple elevators, a juice bar, and three-car parking. The asking price is $4.5 million.

It may sound high, and some ask, "Who is buying these properties?" But the demand is real. Despite global headlines—like Nigeria being called the "poverty capital of the world" a few years ago—a robust upper market remains. Developers are capitalizing on this demand, and these properties are being taken up.

So, while income inequality exists, there's intense real estate activity in the premium segment, especially in cities like Lagos and Abuja. Last December, we experienced what has become popularly known as "Detty December." It's been a tradition for several years—Nigerians in the diaspora return home to celebrate Christmas and New Year with family and friends.

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But last year was exceptional. Many infrastructure upgrades were completed, from the airport in Ikeja to the Island. The Third Mainland Bridge—a 13-kilometre structure—was fully rehabilitated. Streetlights were functioning, and the city offered a vibrant atmosphere: stylish clubs, elegant restaurants, and scenic views.

Many returning Nigerians and expatriates were genuinely shocked. They couldn't believe Lagos had become this polished, cosmopolitan hub. Airbnbs were fully booked, serviced apartments were unavailable, and hotels were near 100% occupancy.

Because I work in real estate brokerage, I receive countless inquiries from people wanting to invest—particularly in properties that could be retrofitted into clubs or furnished as short-let apartments. Everyone wants to prepare for the next "Detty December" in 2025. Many are now securing one-, two-, or three-bedroom apartments to furnish them in time for Airbnb demand during Easter, summer, and next December's festivities.

It's a booming period. We have the population, purchasing power, and demand.

These are fascinating times. I know several foreign companies operating here that are doing remarkable business. A friend of mine is the CFO of Tolaram, which manages the Lagos Free Trade Zone—an area attracting over $2 billion in investments.

Close to that are the Lekki Deep Sea Port and the Dangote Refinery, now considered the largest single-train refinery in the world. The Lagos State Government is also developing a new airport near the refinery, which is drawing even more commercial interest to the area.

So, energy is not only focused on residential or commercial urban centers—it's also shifting to industrial infrastructure and strategic logistics corridors.

So, I was just speaking towards the fact that it's not only, attractive the upper end of the pyramid, even the middle and the lower end.

There is a strong focus now—even from the Federal Government—on increasing housing supply. They're planning to build 20,000 homes across the federation.

At the state level, the Lagos State Government is also taking action. They're opening up new areas and expanding infrastructure so that even people living on the fringes or in satellite towns around Lagos can access affordable land and construct their bungalows or apartments.

So, I see tremendous opportunities in the real estate sector across all segments—luxury, mid-range, and affordable—.

Jacobsen: This year also marks a significant moment—a global real estate conference in Lagos. Can you tell us more?

Opatola: Yes. FIABCI-Nigeria will host the FIABCI World Congress here in Lagos for the first time. In the 53 years since our chapter was established, this is the first time the World Congress will take place in Nigeria and the entire African continent.

It will be held from June 9 to June 13, 2025, at the Eko Hotel and Suites. It's a week-long international event, and we're thrilled.

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We'll begin with a golf tournament and a welcome gala. Then, we'll have two plenary sessions on topics like global housing trends, PropTech, sustainability, the Sustainable Development Goals, smart cities, and prime developments.

We're expecting 150 to 200 international FIABCI delegates and global real estate professionals, many of whom have never been to Nigeria. We've also planned a study tour of Lagos so they can experience the city, its culture, and its real estate market firsthand.

One of the highlights will be the Prix d'Excellence Awards, often called the "Oscars of real estate." This global competition honours the most outstanding design, retail, sustainability, architecture, and livability projects, including green buildings. The awards night is always an exquisite and colourful affair.

We'll also host the FIABCI General Assembly, where new international leadership will be elected. The event will conclude with a farewell dinner.

We're expecting around 65 speakers from around the world. Among them is Kevin Brown, the President-Elect of the National Association of Realtors (NAR) in the U.S. He attended the NAR conference last year, had a fantastic time, and was thrilled to accept our keynote invitation.

We'll also welcome Cliff Long and John Gromley, senior figures from the U.S. real estate scene. From the UN, Maimunah Mohd Sharif, the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, is also scheduled to deliver a keynote.

Another notable guest is Rego Rancic, the Minister of Construction and Architecture from Hungary, who recently confirmed his attendance—he's never been to Nigeria before and is eager to visit and speak.

Most exciting for us locally, we've also received confirmation from the President of Nigeria, who rarely makes physical appearances at conferences like these. His attendance is a significant endorsement.

The President has confirmed that he will grace the occasion. We're also honoured to welcome our former Vice President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, who will deliver a keynote address. He's incredibly eloquent, has a brilliant legal mind, and is a respected statesman.

Several ministers will also attend, making it a high-level and truly engaging gathering. What makes our conference unique is the intentional diversity on every panel. Each session will feature a Pan-African perspective.

We'll be joined by the Ugandan Minister of Housing and representatives from Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa. One of our featured speakers is Sean Godoy, a leading PropTech thought leader from South Africa. So, the conversations will be well-rounded, multidisciplinary, and internationally relevant.

We've taken the time to curate a program that includes the industry's best minds, ensuring each session is engaging, insightful, and memorable. It's not just about real estate; it's about learning, networking, and cultural exchange. We're also putting strong hospitality measures in place to ensure our guests get to know the city of Lagos in a meaningful and enjoyable way.

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Having attended several FIABCI events globally, I understand the effort required to host something of this magnitude. We're matching—and even exceeding—that standard here.

The theme of the Congress is: "Global Real Estate Renaissance."

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The Global State of Optimism

2025/08/19



In 2023, **LG Electronics** launched a global survey to embody their “Life’s Good” philosophy centered on brave optimism. The survey revealed surprisingly high levels of optimism worldwide, countering prevalent pessimistic views. Utilizing these insights, LG initiated the “Optimism Your Feed” campaign on TikTok, collaborating with Professor Casey Fiesler to promote positive content through curated playlists that influence user feeds. Additionally, LG plans to integrate survey findings into future marketing and product innovations, emphasizing that optimism is a deliberate and active choice. Addressing Gen Z’s concerns, LG fosters informed optimism and aims to merge technology, optimism, and happiness through smart innovations and Affectionate Intelligence.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What inspired LG Electronics conduct a global survey on optimism?

LG Electronics: In 2023 LG wanted to tell the world what Life’s Good really meant. In LG’s eyes, Life’s Good means believing in the power of optimism. Not blind optimism, but brave optimism. Optimism that spurs you to want better from your life every day. But this isn’t just an empty brand gesture, it’s a real way of thinking at LG, and a fundamental belief of the company. With that in mind, LG wanted to understand better optimism around the world, which spurred the inaugural survey.

Jacobsen: What were the most surprising findings of the survey?

LG Electronics: The most surprising fact was that optimism levels around the world were, generally, high. It can often feel easy to feel pessimistic about the world and think the rest of the world must feel the same, but in actual fact people were positive and optimistic about their own futures and the world around them.

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Jacobsen: How does LG plan to leverage the survey results to enhance consumer experiences if at all?

LG Electronics: In the journey to increase optimism, this is the launch point for LG to continue spreading optimism globally through immersive experiences and product usage. Our initial studies found that optimism was waning in the world. The results of this study have given us a number of insights into what gets in the way of people feeling more optimistic, and where it feels right to do so LG wants to help people feel more optimistic.

Jacobsen: Can you elaborate on the "Optimism your feed" campaign and the impact on social media users?

LG Electronics: Recognizing the intricate and often rigid nature of social media algorithms, LG collaborated with Professor Casey Fiesler, a luminary in social media research. Rather than attempting a direct overhaul of TikTok's algorithm, the strategy was ingenious: 'hack' the existing system by signaling a preference for optimistic content. This subtle manipulation aimed to shift user feeds organically toward positivity.

LG introduced OYF, a revolutionary tool designed to perpetuate optimism within the digital landscape. This innovative campaign delivered a meticulously curated TikTok playlist teeming with positive, uplifting content.

Each interaction with the playlist—be it a view, like, share, or accumulated watch time—fed into the algorithm, incrementally tailoring users' For You Playlist (FYPs) to reflect more hopeful and joyous content.

Jacobsen: How do entertainment and AI drive optimism among consumers

LG Electronics: Our survey found that over 50% of people surveyed were very, to extremely optimistic about AI in the future. This isn't to say AI is driving their optimism, but that it is not a major barrier to them feeling optimistic.

Jacobsen: Given the findings about Gen Z's concerns about optimism potentially being harmful, how does LG address these concerns? I only agree insofar as one defines this as sole narrow form of pollyannish stance on happiness. But who truly believes that?

LG Electronics: LG's point of view on optimism believes that it is a brave choice to see the optimistic values when the world pushes pessimism. The choice aspect of this is the most important part, particularly with the reservations Gen Z might have. You are right in that a polyannish approach to life is foolhardy, but that isn't the optimism LG believes in. LG's belief in optimism is that it is a choice, and requires an understanding of what is going on in the world, and a willingness to do something about it. Optimism is a brave choice, and an active choice.

Jacobsen: How does LG plan to incorporate findings from this survey into future marketing or product innovation?

LG Electronics: We plan on using the findings of this survey as a launching pad for future campaigns. LG deeply believes in optimism, and this survey gives us many reasons people don't feel optimistic. The trick is finding authentic places where LG can help.

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Jacobsen: What are LG's next steps in exploring the intersection of technology, optimism, and happiness?

LG Electronics: Everything LG does is in service of making people believe that 'Life's Good'. We're constantly exploring how to make life better with intuitive, smart innovations. Our belief that AI should be more human is why it's called Affectionate Intelligence at LG. And we're excited to see how all these elements come together in the future.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time.

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Updates from Canadian Border Services Agency

2025/08/19



Rebecca Purdy (she/her/elle) is a Senior Communications Advisor for the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA). The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) intercepted three prohibited devices at Vancouver International Airport on April 26, 2024 as part of its mandate to screen goods entering and leaving Canada. While investigative details remain undisclosed, the CBSA collaborates with law enforcement agencies, including the RCMP, to combat smuggling and organized crime. Under Canada's Border Plan, the government is investing $1.3 billion to enhance border security and immigration systems. The CBSA employs intelligence-led screening, detection tools, and international partnerships to prevent illegal goods and criminal activity while ensuring the safe and efficient flow of trade and travel across 1,200 ports of entry.

Interview completed January 3, 2025. Editor's note (updated Aug. 18, 2025): The April 26, 2024 YVR seizure later resulted in charges announced Dec. 27, 2024 with early-2025 court dates. Also note that Canada's $1.3-billion Border Plan announced in Dec. 2024 is being implemented through 2025 (with major allocations to CBSA and RCMP); for activity and seizure figures cited below, see CBSA's 2024 Year in Review.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What were the circumstances of the Vancouver International Airport interception on April 26, 2024?

Rebecca Purdy: On April 26, 2024, Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) border services officers at Vancouver International Airport Commercial Operations intercepted and seized three prohibited devices in a courier package. The CBSA has a mandate to screen goods entering and leaving Canada. All goods must be declared and each declaration is subject to a risk assessment. Border Services Officers are trained in examination techniques and use a risk management approach, state-of-the-art detection technologies and indicators to determine whether further examination is required.

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Jacobsen: What actions were taken by the CBSA and the RCMP during the investigation?

Purdy: The CBSA does not comment on investigative steps in specific cases. For publicly available information on this case, please refer to **the news release** and the court record.

Jacobsen: On other subject matter, how does Canada's Border Plan aim to address resource allocation issues at ports of entry? What mechanisms does the CBSA use to screen and intercept illegal goods? How do we detect and prevent illegal drugs from entering Canada under the new Plan?

Purdy: Canada is investing $1.3 billion to bolster security at the border and strengthen the immigration system, all while keeping Canadians safe. Information available on the plan is available here: **The Government of Canada's Border Plan: significant investments to strengthen border security and our immigration system – Canada.ca**.

For additional information, including traveller statistics and seizure statistics, please see the **2024 Year in review: CBSA protecting Canadians and supporting our economy** news release and the **accomplishments by the numbers** (for the period between January 1 and October 31, 2024).

Every day last year, billions of dollars in goods and services and about 400,000 people crossed the Canada-U.S. border. The CBSA is Canada's first line of defence at 1,200 ports of entry across the country. Day in and day out, approximately 8,500 CBSA frontline personnel play a crucial role protecting our communities by preventing dangerous goods and people from entering Canada. Across the country, the CBSA employs over 200 criminal investigators who investigate individuals and businesses that commit serious offences against Canada's border and criminal legislation. Abroad, the Agency employs approximately 60 international officers at 40 missions in 35 countries who help push our borders out. The CBSA strategically dedicates its resources to address the threats that Canada faces while supporting the flow of legitimate trade and travel across the border. The CBSA works in an operating environment that changes on a daily basis and we are ready to respond and adapt as needed.

As smugglers are increasingly utilizing more sophisticated concealment methods in smuggling attempts, the CBSA employs a number of tools to stem the flow of illegal and prohibited materials in and out of Canada. The Agency remains vigilant in the interdiction of prohibited firearms, weapons and illegal drugs to ensure they remain off the streets and out of local communities. Guided by intelligence, our officers use contraband detection tools such as handheld devices, small-scale and large-scale X-ray machines, and detector dogs. We prioritize and risk-assess importations and exportations of goods entering and leaving Canada to make sure they are properly declared and meet import/export requirements. We support efforts to combat organized crime by using a risk-management approach to identify and intercept shipments containing contraband or goods obtained through crime.

The CBSA works regularly and closely with domestic and U.S. law enforcement partners, including the RCMP and other Canadian police agencies, provincial and territorial governments, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Homeland Security Investigations, the United States Coast Guard, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, and the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in a joint effort to seize drugs and guns and prevent those who

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engage in criminal activity from entering Canada and to assist with investigations. The Agency regularly shares relevant information on border and national security issues with its national and international law enforcement partners as well as other government departments in Canada, to ensure the health, safety, and security of Canadians. The CBSA carefully monitors global trends and patterns to ensure that its frontline border services officers are well-equipped to identify and prevent illegal goods from entering and exiting Canada.

Criminals try to exploit the border both ways. U.S. authorities count on us in the same way we count on them to share information and identify threats to our countries. It is a tried and tested partnership that has kept our countries safe for decades.

With the collaboration of our partners, we support national security and public safety, while facilitating the free flow of legitimate trade and travel.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Rebecca.

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Intelligent Design Creationism's Fall from Grace

2025/08/20

"The Act impermissibly endorses religion by advancing the religious belief that a supernatural being created humankind."

Supreme Court of the United States (Edwards v. Aguillard, 1987)

"Creationism, intelligent design and other claims of supernatural intervention in the origin of life or of species are not science because they are not testable by the methods of science."

National Academy of Sciences (1999)

"The lack of scientific warrant for so-called 'intelligent design theory' makes it improper to include as a part of science education."

American Association for the Advancement of Science (2002)

"Intelligent design is not science. It is not testable, it is not falsifiable, it does not generate hypotheses, and it does not provide explanations for the natural world."

National Science Teachers Association

"Science is a philosophy of discovery. Intelligent design is a philosophy of ignorance. You cannot build a program of discovery on the assumption that nobody is smart enough to figure out the answer to a problem."

Dr. Neil DeGrasse Tyson

"[Intelligent design is] not a scientific argument at all, but a religious one."

Dr. Richard Dawkins

"…[intelligent design] fails in a fundamental way to qualify as a scientific theory [and is] doing considerable damage to faith."

Dr. Francis Collins (Leader, Human Genome Project)

When I use the term "Fall from Grace," I mean the profound loss of academic, public, and scientific credibility experienced by Intelligent Design (ID) advocates once their pseudoscientific claims were exposed (Jacobsen, 2022a; Jacobsen, 2022b; Jacobsen, 2024; Jacobsen, 2025). *ID is a religious advocacy project framed as science*. Essentially, it's evolution or bust.

ID Creationism was a political movement intended as a social change agent through a vehicle of a pseudoscientific proposition, ID Creationism or adapted traditional Creationism (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025a). This was documented through the leaked *Wedge Document* (National Center for Science Education, 2008).

It did not have much academic or intellectual cache in the first place, outside of religious believer circles, who are the vast majority of the proponents of this (Scott & Branch, 2002). It's a broad-based advocacy effort primarily rooted in Christian theological commitments (National Center for Science Education, 2008).

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Most proponents were, and are, well-educated Protestant Christian men (International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design, 2013). Some exceptions included Dr. David Berlinski (2025) as an agnostic Jew, Christopher Michael Langan as a self-described "reality theorist" (Langan, 2025), and Muzaffar Iqbal as a Muslim (International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design, 2013), and possibly others.

ID Creationism was an adaptation of Creationism. Creationism as a "belief that the universe and the various forms of life were created by God out of nothing (*ex nihilo*)" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025b). Its main sophistications are two foundational ideas: Irreducible Complexity of Dr. Michael Behe, and Specified Complexity of Dr. William Dembski (Paradowski, 2022).

Behe defines Irreducible Complexity as a "single system composed of several well-matched, interacting parts that contribute to the basic function, wherein the removal of any one of the parts causes the system to effectively cease functioning" (Behe, 1996).

Dembski defines Specified Complexity as "the condition in which something is both complex (i.e., not easily produced by chance) and specified (i.e., matches an independently given pattern)" (Dembski, 1998).

Both have been thoroughly debunked. Irreducible Complexity fails to demonstrate evolutionary pathways. Specified Complexity fails due to a probability miscalculation and lacks a reproducible metric. On the propaganda for Christianity and Theism behind a veneer of intellectualism, we can quote its intellectual founders, Dembski and Behe.

Dembski said in two separate instances: "The Designer of intelligent design is, ultimately, the Christian God" (Williams, 2007), and "Intelligent design is just the Logos theology of John's Gospel restated in the idiom of information theory" (Dembski, 2019). Behe stated, "I think the designer is God. I'm a Roman Catholic." (Paula Zahn Now, 2005). These eventuated in key, definitive court battles (National Center for Science Education, 2005).

In short, ID Creationism is Christian political propaganda framed as scientific dissent based on the statements and philosophical frame provided by *its founders*. A scattered few were drawn to the pseudoscientific ideas. Some individuals became associated with these ideas without fully anticipating the reputational consequences, or other unforeseen consequences. As a theology program, therefore, it's culturally ministerial in nature.

Even within Christian communities, over time, many were able to distinguish ID's pseudoscientific veneer from legitimate inquiry. Select Christian intellectual founders of ID Creationism were candid about religious motives internally, but publicly misrepresented ID as a secular scientific alternative.

Association with the movement carried reputational costs once its scientific shortcomings were publicly established, because its public claims diverged from the internal documents and were ultimately rejected as lacking scientific support. The *Wedge Document* was part of this spear (National Center for Science Education, 2008).

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It was produced by the Discovery Institute's Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture (2025). The main claim is "scientific materialism" was corrosive to culture (Ibid.). They sought to replace this perspective with a theistic comprehension of reality (Ibid.).

ID positioned various 'pressure points' for challenging Darwinian evolution (Ibid.).The metaphor of a wedge was about a strategy to undermine the perceived dominance of materialism in culture and science (Ibid.).

They proposed three phases for this: Research, Writing & Publication; Publicity & Opinion-making; and, Cultural Confrontation & Renewal (Ibid.). That is, a comprehensive, phased project for theistic cultural influence.

They wanted to fund and produce scholarship, promote ID in books, conferences, mass media, apologetic seminars, trainings for teachers, and think-tanks, and to pursue legal strategies and then integrate ID into public school curricula (Ibid.).

The institutional and media leadership for this was Stephen C. Meyer, Phillip Johnson, and Bruce Chapman (Ibid.). Discovery Senior Fellow Dr. Stephen Meyer directs the Center, while its original strategy came from the mindset of the late Phillip Johnson and the media expertise of Discovery President Bruce Chapman (Ibid.).

They provided bases for metrics, too. They had five-year aims from 1999-2003(/4) and 20-year aims too. By year five, they wanted to have ID Creationism accepted as a valid scientific alternative to evolution via natural selection, to trigger major public debate, to publish 30 books and 100 scholarly articles, and then influence major public opinion and secular national media attention. These benchmarks were never met, underscoring the project's ultimate failure.

By year 20, they wanted to make ID Creationism the dominant perspective in science and diffused throughout the arts, humanities, law, natural sciences, and public policy. Once more, none of these goals were achieved — they failed.

Even when trying to change the opinions of the public Christian community, who are pretty discerning over enough time and getting over in-group bias, they failed to change them much either. This reflects well on Christian communities themselves, who proved discerning enough to separate sense from non-sense despite initial in-group bias.

Other aims stipulated were the creation of fellowships, research funding, media productions, alliances, and the like. In total, about 60 individuals accepted fellowships through ISCID before the organization eventually became defunct.[1]

Per statement of Judge John E. Jones III (U.S. District Court) on if ID Creationism counts as science, "ID is not science… We find that ID fails on three different levels. … Moreover, ID cannot uncouple itself from its creationist, and thus religious, antecedents" (Wired Staff, 2006).

In the end, Intelligent Design Creationism lost in the courts, in academia, and in public credibility. It remains a cultural-theological movement, not a scientific one—an instructive case study in how pseudoscience falters when exposed to rigorous scrutiny.

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Next, we will examine the outcomes of the ID creationists' failed attempt to impose a pseudoscientific, religious metanarrative on culture, focusing on the intellectual leaders and for individuals involved in these core creationist or ID Creationism initiatives.

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Footnotes

[1] Those individuals who accepted a fellowship position were the following:

1. d'Abrera, Bernard
2. Behe, Michael J.
3. Bloom, John
4. Bradley, Walter
5. Broom, Neil
6. Budziszewski, J.
7. Campbell, John Angus
8. Carlson, Russell W.
9. Chiu, David K. Y.
10. Collins, Robin
11. Craig, William Lane
12. de Jong, Kenneth
13. Dembski, William A.
14. Discher, Mark R.
15. Dix, Daniel
16. Field, Fred
17. Gonzalez, Guillermo
18. Gordon, Bruce L.
19. Humphreys, David
20. Hunter, Cornelius
21. Iqbal, Muzaffar

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22. Jackson, Quinn Tyler
23. Johanson, Conrad
24. Kaita, Robert
25. Keener, James
26. Koons, Robert C.
27. Kwon, Younghun
28. Langan, Christopher Michael
29. Larmer, Robert
30. Leisola, Matti
31. Lennard, Stan
32. Lennox, John
33. LoSasso, Gina Lynne
34. Macosko, Jed
35. Mallard, Bonnie
36. Mims, Forrest M. III
37. Minnich, Scott
38. Nelson, Paul
39. Palda, Filip
40. Peltzer, Edward T.
41. Plantinga, Alvin
42. Poenie, Martin
43. Puente, Carlos E.
44. Ratzsch, Del
45. Richards, Jay Wesley
46. Rickard, Terry
47. Roche, John
48. Ruys, Andrew
49. Schaefer, Henry F.
50. Schwartz, Jeffrey M.
51. Skell, Philip
52. Skiff, Frederick

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53. Stephan, Karl D.
54. Sternberg, Richard
55. Tipler, Frank
56. Wells, Jonathan
57. Zoeller-Greer, Peter

See International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design (2013).

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Ontario Nurses' Association in Negotiations

2025/08/20



Erin Ariss is a registered nurse and the Provincial President of the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA). With decades of emergency department experience, she is a dedicated advocate for nurses and public health care. Ariss has been instrumental in addressing issues such as access to personal protective equipment during the pandemic and promoting workplace safety. The Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) and the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) are in contract negotiations under a nondisclosure agreement, but their proposals are starkly opposed. ONA prioritizes improved RN staffing ratios to address overwhelming workloads, enhance patient care, and reduce nurse attrition. Ontario has the worst RN-to-population ratio in Canada, leading to ER closures and delays. ONA warns that hospital CEOs' proposals could trigger a mass nurse exodus. The negotiations are crucial as ONA seeks an agreement rather than arbitration, which has determined contracts for 14 years. ONA questions the origins of OHA's far-reaching proposals, raising broader concerns.

Editor's note (updated Aug. 18, 2025): Erin Ariss remains Provincial President of the Ontario Nurses' Association; 2025 hospital-sector talks with the Ontario Hospital Association broke off on Jan. 31 and moved to interest arbitration held Apr. 2–3, 14 & 17 before Arbitrator Sheri Price —whose award is still pending. Ontario continues to have the lowest RN-to-population ratio in Canada (651 per 100,000 in the latest CIHI data), a key context for ONA's push on safe staffing ratios.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What are the main issues with the current contract negotiations between the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) and the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA)?

Erin Ariss: We cannot get specific as both the OHA and ONA are negotiating under a nondisclosure agreement. However, what we can say is that our two organizations have come to the table with proposals that couldn't be more opposite.

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Jacobsen: Why are RN staffing ratios a top priority for front-line members of ONA?

Ariss: The number-one priority of our members is better workloads that would allow them to provide the best-quality patient care they can. The impossibly heavy workloads they have experienced for years now have taken a large toll on them, and our patients are not receiving the best care that they both need and deserve because of time constraints. Nurse staffing ratios have been introduced elsewhere and have been shown to reduce the rates of complications and death in patients, and resulted in lower attrition rates for nurses. Overall they are a cost savings. They are win-win.

Jacobsen: How does ONA President Erin Ariss characterize the understaffing in public hospitals?

Ariss: Ontario's understaffing is the worst in Canada. An annual report (CIHI) shows Ontario has consistently had the worst RN-to-population ratio in the country for almost a decade. That has led to ER closures, delays in care, hallway medicine and cancelled surgeries.

Jacobsen: What might be the potential consequences based on the proposals of hospital CEOs?

Ariss: It's not an exaggeration to say the proposals put forward by hospital CEOs would result in an exodus of nurses and health-care professionals from our hospitals across the province. It will make things much, much worse.

Jacobsen: Is this similar to the consequences to proposals from the Ford government)?

Ariss: We do not bargain with the government in the hospital sector. But the proposals from the OHA are so far-reaching, we question where they came from.

Jacobsen: Why is this round of negotiations significant given the last negotiation happening 14 years ago?

Ariss: The last negotiation happened two years ago. That ended in arbitration, as did every other round of negotiations for the past 14 years. ONA is pushing for the OHA to reach an agreement for its 60,000+ nurses and health-care professionals in negotiations, NOT send the matter to an arbitrator again, who will impose a contract.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Erin.

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Architects of Intelligent Design Creationism, Then and Now

2025/08/21



Previous articles in series at the bottom.

“The ID movement itself recognizes that their view stands in opposition to science. One finds this not only in the leaked Discovery Institute “Wedge” document, which discusses overturning what they see as the anti-theistic assumptions of modernism, but throughout ID writings. I’ll just give a few examples. William Dembski writes:

The scientific picture of the world championed since the Enlightenment is not just wrong but massively wrong. Indeed entire fields of inquiry, especially in the human sciences… need to be rethought from the ground up in terms of intelligent design. (Dembski 1999, p. 224)

Another ID theorist, J. P. Moreland expressed the conviction that ID is not science by coining a new term:

If (naturalists) want to define science in naturalistic terms, then **we can define a new term, creascience, that allows for the recognition of discontinuities in nature that indicate the intentional, immediate intervention of a first cause that resembles a person.** Note, if God does not exist, or if he has never intervened in the world through primary causality, then science and creascience are empirically equivalent and equally adequate approaches to the study of nature. The main difference between science and creascience is that the latter allows for the possibility that primary causality has occurred and can be recognized, (Moreland 1989)

Here we see another conceptual link to creation science even in Moreland’s choice for the roots of his coined word. Whatever one calls it, IDCs themselves recognize that it is not science.”

Dr. Robert T. Pennock

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"It is ironic that several of these individuals, who so staunchly and proudly touted their religious convictions in public, would time and again lie to cover their tracks and disguise the real purpose behind the ID Policy."

Judge John E. Jones III

"Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another."

Leviticus 19:11

"You shall not bear false witness…"

Exodus 20:16

These ethical admonitions from modern courts and their purported holy scripture frame the controversy. The first article in this newest series on the more sophisticated forms of Creationism, "Intelligent Design Creationism's Fall from Grace," gave the layout of the long-term failure outcomes of the Intelligent Design (ID) Creationism movement over the last several decades and then listed some of its key individuals (Jacobsen, 2025).

The ID movement, rooted in attempts to combat "scientific materialism" and guided by the Discovery Institute's *Wedge Document* (National Center for Science Education, 2008), sought to advance a theistic worldview in culture, but failed due to its lack of testability and falsifiability (National Center for Science Education, 2005).

This article will cover the core architects and leaders, while the subsequent articles will cover the institutions and figures. The key architects are Dr. Michael Behe, Dr. William Dembski, Dr. Stephen C. Meyer, Philip Johnson (1940-2019), and Bruce Chapman (Orr, 2005).

Dr. Michael Behe is a biochemist and professor at Lehigh University (Lehigh University, 2025a). He developed the concept of Irreducible Complexity (Paradowski, 2022; Behe, 1996). He claims certain biological systems are too complex to have evolved (Ibid.). He authored *Darwin's Black Box* (1996) to describe this. He identifies the intelligent creator of ID as the Christian God for himself, as he is Catholic–while threading the argument ID does not necessarily endorse any particular designer (Paula Zahn Now, 2005).

His idea of Irreducible Complexity is thoroughly regarded as pseudoscience, heavily criticized and refuted by relevant major scientific bodies (National Center for Science Education, 2008a; Wells, 2008). He remains on the faculty of the university, but the department does not endorse the views (Lehigh University, 2025b). In the ID community, he remains a major figure (Discovery Institute, 2025a).

Dr. William Dembski is a mathematician and philosopher (Discovery Institute, 2025b). He formalized the idea of Specified Complexity in information-theoretic terms (1998). He argues certain patterns are too complex and specific to evolve (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025a). He explicitly linked ID to Christian theology; he explained ID as Information Theory in the idiom of John's Gospel (Williams, 2007; Dembski, 2019).

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His ideas have been largely dismissed as pseudoscience (National Center for Science Education, 2008a). He is known as a historical figure significant in the Christian culture wars over evolution, particularly relating to science curricula and religion in public life.

Dr. Stephen C. Meyer is a senior fellow and director at the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture (Discovery Institute, 2025c). He has been a leading architect of ID. He directs DI's Center for Science and Culture; the leaked *Wedge* document outlined the CSC's strategy to 'defeat scientific materialism' and advance a theistic understanding of nature (National Center for Science Education, 2008b). A cultural strategy to advance ID in culture and science (Ibid.).

Meyer's works have failed in broad and numbered peer-reviewed success, even when publishing in the *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington* in 2004; the paper was repudiated (National Center for Science Education, 2004). The journal clarified: The review process was mishandled and the paper failed to meet scientific standards (Ibid.). In addition, the scientific consensus against ID Creationism remains firm on it, i.e., its pseudoscience (National Center for Science Education, 2008a).

Other footnotes include the *Kitzmiller v. Dover* (2005) court case loss. ID has failed to produce a viable scientific research program. ID is known as being incapable of uncoupling "itself from its creationist antecedents," not a scientific research program (Jacobsen, 2025). Supernaturalism lost; naturalism was not replaced in science or in culture.

Phillip Johnson (deceased) was a law professor and early intellectual leader of the ID movement (Discovery Institute, 2025d). He was associated in shaping the *Wedge Document* and its overarching strategy via the Discovery Institute to challenge–what they called–"scientific materialism" while simultaneously promoting a theistic worldview (National Center for Science Education, 2008b).

Johnson's legacy became a failure to convince courts or persuade scientists, the Dover ruling blocking ID from classrooms, exposure of the religious core of ID via the *Wedge Document* leak, and the maintenance of a largely secular and naturalistic science in culture.

Bruce Chapman is the Chairman of the Board of the Discovery Institute (Discovery Institute, 2025e). He is another of the core figures promoting ID via public outreach and media influence. His media expertise has been instrumental in the ID movement.

Discovery Institute under Chapman is identified largely as a religious advocacy group commonly with internal perspectives as a public-policy think tank. Regardless, it lost any potential scientific credibility or scientific research program for ID.

Its association and identity as a religious advocacy group is firmly established, and, therefore, a non-neutral producer of scholarship. *Kitzmiller* (M.D. Pa. 2005) is a district-court decision (binding only in that jurisdiction) as a case in point, but has been nationally influential as a persuasive authority on public education policy.

However, based on the significant decades-long failures of these men and associated intellectual communities, ironically, their failures have bolstered secular and scientific advocacy.

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The next articles will cover the Discovery Institute/Center for Science & Culture (CSC), ISCID/PCID (journal), Biologic Institute (DI-affiliated lab), Foundation for Thought and Ethics (FTE), Access Research Network (ARN), and others, and associated figures.

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Omima Jabal on Human Rights and Sudan

2025/08/21



Part 1 of 2

Omima Jabal, a Sudanese humanitarian, volunteer in the Emergency Response Room (ERR), a grassroots initiative providing critical aid during the war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Initially focused on disaster relief, ERR expanded its work in response to the war, providing food distribution, medical aid, and civilian protection while maintaining neutrality. In this 2-part interview, Jabal explains that USAID funding cuts have severely impacted local civil society organizations, forcing projects to freeze and depriving communities of essential food, medical care, and protection. This shortage intensifies resource scarcity, conflict, and human rights abuses. Despite challenges, grassroots and women-led groups continue coordinating aid and advocating for flexible international funding. Jabal calls for urgent policy changes to ensure humanitarian assistance reaches vulnerable Sudanese communities and supports local initiatives amid instability.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: The Trump administration came into power following the U.S. election. One of its early policy changes was cutting funding to USAID. What impact has this had on the Sudanese people?

Omima Jabal: The effects have been significant and widespread, causing considerable harm. The decision has particularly impacted Sudanese civil society organizations (CSOs), many of which have relocated to neighboring countries. These organizations relied heavily on USAID funding.

As soon as the funding cuts were implemented, most CSOs froze their projects, halting ongoing initiatives. These projects had two key aspects: one focused on direct collaboration with grassroots groups, including the ERR and other community-led initiatives.

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With USAID funding frozen, all projects dependent on this financial support came to a standstill. People on the ground are now deeply concerned about the resulting shortages, limiting access to essential daily needs.

Another significant impact is on individuals employed by Sudanese national organizations. Many of these employees are the primary providers for their families, whether in Sudan or abroad. Without funding, they can no longer support themselves, let alone their dependents.

Overall, this decision has significantly reduced Sudan's already limited humanitarian aid. Previously, Sudan had been promised additional funding from USAID and other sources. However, with these cuts, those commitments have been withdrawn.

Given the rapidly deteriorating situation, this lack of funding places people at severe risk, affecting their ability to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and medical care.

This is a major concern. As Sudanese people and as CSOs, we urge the U.S. government to reconsider this decision, as it has affected the lives of millions. This funding is critical for humanitarian efforts.

Jacobsen: How does the reduction in USAID funding contribute to an increase in human rights abuses for the Sudanese people?

Jabal: It ultimately comes down to funding. As mentioned, many Sudanese civil society organizations (CSOs) and grassroots groups depend on USAID funding. Cutting this funding creates a financial shortfall.

A lack of funds means a lack of resources, leading to multiple crises. The scarcity of resources can cause conflicts among people struggling to survive with few available resources.

Sudan is already facing a severe resource shortage. Without external support, competition over these scarce resources can escalate into violence.

Additionally, when essential aid—such as food and medical assistance—is cut off, it directly impacts people's survival, leading to widespread human rights violations. The fundamental rights of the Sudanese people to receive humanitarian aid and support are being severely undermined by these funding cuts.

Jacobsen: What specific human rights standards should be in place to protect humanitarian workers and volunteers operating in active conflict zones?

Jabal: This is a difficult question we've been asked many times. There is no single way to guarantee the protection of aid workers on the ground, but some measures can be taken.

First, the international community must officially recognize these individuals as humanitarian workers, even if they are not affiliated with a registered organization.

Second, it is crucial to ensure that funding channels remain open and uninterrupted. This would allow aid workers to continue delivering assistance at different levels despite their challenges. However, there is no universal solution if we talk about concrete procedures to protect aid workers.

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It ties back to the broader issue of protection, which I have discussed previously. If aid workers face immediate danger, they need to be relocated—either within Sudan or outside the country—depending on their willingness and the level of safety available to them.

Jacobsen: When gathering data in grassroots initiatives, what are the challenges regarding transparency, accountability, and data security? Given the context, these systems are not necessarily operating in secure conditions.

Jabal: Yes. That is one of the key challenges—ensuring information availability while maintaining security.

Volunteers working on the ground face significant risks, including threats of kidnapping. Women, in particular, are at heightened risk of sexual violence.

Another major issue is data availability. The necessary information exists, but due to the lack of internet access and limited resources, much remains inaccessible or is only available in physical form—written on paper rather than stored digitally.

Even when data is collected, accessibility is limited, and only a small fraction of the information reaches those who need it. Additionally, being an aid worker in Sudan is inherently dangerous. The risks of collecting and handling data make this work even more challenging.

Jacobsen: What about support from the Sudanese diaspora outside of Sudan, whether financial or through expertise? How do you build networks with those individuals?

Jabal: The Sudanese diaspora plays a crucial role in this crisis. At the beginning of the war, there was no support from international organizations or external funding—everything depended on the Sudanese diaspora, which became the primary channel for funding.

Even now, after USAID funds have been frozen, the Sudanese diaspora continues to work collectively to support people on the ground financially.

There is no single mechanism for managing Sudanese diaspora engagement. It largely depends on geographical areas. Diaspora groups are often organized based on location, forming networks within neighbourhoods or communities. This structure varies from one grassroots group to another. Their contributions are primarily personal donations, which grassroots groups manage directly.

Another major contribution from the diaspora is advocacy. They actively campaign for Sudanese communities, raising awareness and influencing international discussions. Overall, the Sudanese diaspora is a fundamental pillar in localizing aid and ensuring that support reaches those who need it. As Sudanese, we are working hard to strengthen these efforts and tailor aid distribution to the needs of local communities.

Jacobsen: Destruction is an obvious tragedy. However, the silver lining is the potential for reconstruction—an opportunity to build within a rights-based framework for civil society while ensuring sustainable and inclusive development.

What opportunities do you see despite the tragedy? Because in my interactions with you, you seem optimistic and solutions-oriented.

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Jabal: Regarding this, grassroots groups today represent the future of Sudan. The high level of youth engagement in these groups and initiatives creates real hope for the development of Sudanese civil society. We have internal challenges within civil society, but grassroots organizations actively work to overcome these obstacles.

In some ways, they have already fostered an environment in which Sudanese national organizations and grassroots groups—whether ERRs, community initiatives, or other networks—are beginning to coordinate more effectively.

This coordination mechanism is key. The opportunity is to develop a structured and collaborative approach between Sudanese civil society and the international community. This will allow aid, solutions, and funding to be tailored to the real needs of the Sudanese people, with their input at different levels and across various regions.

Another major opportunity is using this coordination to strengthen the capacities and skills of grassroots groups. We are also preparing them for Sudan's future by supporting them in implementing locally driven solutions.

Jacobsen: Given their unique vulnerabilities in these contexts, how should support for women and children and their rights be addressed?

Jabal: Protecting women and children is essential. The Emergency Response Room (ERR) has taken several steps to address these issues.

While we recognize the need to promote women's rights, most grassroots groups are led by women and manage their needs in a highly organized and sophisticated way.

Women's offices, women-led initiatives, and groups operate across different parts of Sudan. These groups focus on meeting the needs of women and children, particularly during the crisis. They do not just work for women; they also provide essential services for children, including psychosocial support and early healthcare systems.

They are also developing their skills and advocating for more gender-sensitive aid policies across various sectors.

Most grassroots groups consist of women who have been actively contributing since day one of the war. It is truly remarkable to see what women can accomplish. In general aid efforts, such as community kitchens, women are key contributors—they prepare meals, distribute food, and ensure people are fed.

In the healthcare sector, many women and girls serve as nurses and doctors, providing critical medical assistance across different areas and conditions. We also have designated safe spaces, Women's and Girls' Safe Spaces and Child-Friendly Spaces, which provide crucial protection and support.

The most important thing is to ensure that aid is gender-sensitive. This has been an ongoing discussion among various grassroots groups, but women have proven their capability time and time again. Many projects are now directly addressing the needs of women and children.

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Women's groups within grassroots movements will be essential in shaping Sudan's future. Their contributions will influence the localization of aid, broader community development, and post-war recovery efforts.

Jacobsen: Returning to the earlier point about USAID funding being cut—what changes in international funding policies are necessary for community-based humanitarian responses to be more robust and effective, particularly in safeguarding the human rights of the Sudanese people?

Jabal: According to the Sudanese context, specific policies need urgent change, and we have been discussing them for a long time. This is critical.

One key issue is the flexibility of funding. The international community needs to reassess its approach to Sudan because its context is highly complex and varies significantly by region. For example, the situation in Darfur is not the same as in Khartoum, Kassala in the east, or the southern parts of Sudan.

Applying a rigid funding structure with predetermined criteria or fixed funding channels creates problems. More flexibility in how funds are allocated is needed. Another issue is the policies governing who is eligible to receive funding. As I mentioned, national organizations do not cover all of Sudan.

Certain areas are supported only by grassroots initiatives, community groups, or local organizations. Funding policies must recognize and accommodate these realities. Additionally, the definition of accountability needs to be reconsidered. Grassroots groups are accountable to their communities. Still, their accountability mechanisms do not always align with the international community's.

This does not mean they lack accountability—it means the international community must adapt its expectations to suit the local structures better. Another necessary change is the creation of alternative funding mechanisms. Funding should not be limited to a single channel; multiple funding streams should exist. This would allow for greater adaptability and effectiveness in distributing aid.

By diversifying funding channels, international bodies can better assess the impact and efficiency of aid distribution. The international community currently engages in discussions primarily with government bodies and ministries.

However, in Sudan, control is divided between the SAF (Sudanese Armed Forces) and the RSF (Rapid Support Forces). Since SAF represents the government, international aid allocation discussions often exclude areas not under SAF control.

This means that some regions are left out entirely, and the only viable way to deliver aid in those areas is through grassroots initiatives that operate independently of government control.

Recognizing and supporting these local initiatives would improve aid distribution and effectively reach vulnerable populations. Another crucial factor is coordination among international organizations.

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Although aid efforts are organized into clusters, these do not always function effectively. Each crisis requires tailored coordination strategies.

Instead of relying solely on standard cluster mechanisms, international organizations must work together dynamically, reassessing their approach for each crisis to ensure proper coordination of funds and resources.

So, in summary, the key changes needed are:

- Greater flexibility in funding allocation,
- Expanding eligibility criteria to include grassroots groups,
- Aligning accountability measures with local structures,
- Establishing alternative funding mechanisms,
- Recognizing the importance of grassroots initiatives in conflict zones and
- Improving coordination among international aid organizations.

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The Discovery Institute and Intelligent Design Creationism

2025/08/22



Previous articles in the series at the bottom.

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“To defeat scientific materialism and its destructive moral, cultural and political legacies… To replace materialistic explanations with the theistic understanding that nature and human beings are created by God… To see intelligent design theory as the dominant perspective in science… Discovery Institute’s Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture seeks nothing less than the overthrow of materialism and its cultural legacies.”

“The Wedge Document,” CSC “Wedge” Strategy (1998)

(Documented by National Center for Science Education)

“The mission… is to advance the understanding that human beings and nature are the result of intelligent design… We seek long-term scientific and cultural change through cutting-edge scientific research and scholarship…”

Center for Science & Culture

“The mission of Discovery Institute is to advance a culture of purpose, creativity, and innovation… Mind, not matter, is the source and crown of creation, the wellspring of human achievement.”

Discovery Institute

This isn’t really, and never has been, a debate about science. It’s about religion and philosophy.

Philip E. Johnson

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“The CSRC expressly announces, in the Wedge Document, a program of Christian apologetics to promote ID.”

Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School Dist., 400 F. Supp. 2d 707 (M.D. Pa. 2005)

The Discovery Institute (DI) is a policy think-tank based in Seattle, Washington (Discovery Institute, 2025a). DI was founded in 1991 by Bruce Chapman and George Gilder and presented as a “non-profit, non-partisan” organization to bring together a “global network of scholars, scientists, and policy experts” in the advancement of Intelligent Design (ID) Creationism in various ways (Discovery Institute, 2025b).

In reality, it is a series of ‘programs of Christian apologetics to promote ID Creationism’ through various “cultural and religious goals” to “change the ground rules of science to make room for religion, specifically, beliefs consonant with a particular version of Christianity” (Justia U.S. Law, 2005).

Their stated philosophy is “Mind… is the source and crown of creation, the wellspring of human achievement” as conceived “by the ancient Hebrews, Greeks and Christians, and elaborated in the American Founding Western culture” in contrast to “contemporary materialistic worldview [that] denies the intrinsic dignity and freedom of human beings and enfeebles scientific creativity and technological innovation…[a] vision [of] limited horizons… [and] deadening ideologies of scarcity, conflict, mutual suspicion and despair” (Discovery Institute, 2025c).

DI is the primary driver of ID Creationism to ‘teach the controversy’ (Discovery Institute, 2005). DI has programs in science and culture, wealth and poverty, technology, artificial intelligence, citizen leadership, transforming education, human exceptionalism, and the Cascadia Center (Ibid.).

Its Board of Directors is a respectable size featuring prominent public and political figures, business leaders and innovators, and philanthropic community members (Discovery Institute, 2025d). Its current Chair of the Board is Bruce Chapman, while the former Chair of the Board–and current member of the Board–is Byron Nutley (Ibid.)

Prominent public and political figures are Edmund C. Moy, Howard F. Ahmanson Jr., and Mariana Parks (Ibid.). Business leaders and innovator members are Bryan Mistele, Charles Lundberg, Cole Smead, Dave Barber, Eric Garcia, James Spady, Mike Dunn, Richard Greiling, Skip Gilliland, and Walter Myers III (Ibid.).

Philanthropic community board members are Annmarie Kelly and Kathy Connors (Ibid.). This remains a significant number of prominent people in support of a Christian apologetic missional work under presentation as a policy think-tank.

Its active Senior Fellows are Andrew McDiarmid, Bill Walton, David Klinghoffer, Donald P. Nielsen, Frank Gregorsky, Gale Pooley, George Gilder, Jay W. Richards, John G. West, John Wohlstetter, Jonathan Choe, Jonathan Lesser, Keri D. Ingraham, Marvin Olasky, Michael Medved, Robert Marbut, Scott S. Powell, Stephen C. Meyer, Walter Myers III, and Wesley J. Smith (Discovery Institute, 2025e).

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Its Fellows are Arina Grossu Agnew, Bruce Agnew, Edwin Meese III, Jerry Bowyer, Nathan Lewis, Paul Guppy, Ray B. Chambers, Robert J. Koch, Scott O. Kuznicki, Tim Scala, and Tom Shakely (Ibid.). DI Staff are varied in task and role [1]

They list events of various types including book events (e.g., book launch, author Q&A), conferences (e.g., COSM Technology Summit, Dallas Conference on Science & Faith), education days (e.g., Intelligent Design Education Day), film screenings (e.g., *The American Miracle*, *Fentanyl Death Incorporated*), lectures/talks (e.g., Socrates in the City, Bible & the Rise of Science), luncheons (e.g., lunch discussion on *Presidential Succession*), special experiences (e.g., 2024 total eclipse viewing), and webinars (e.g., *The Privileged Planet* 20th Anniversary webinar) (Discovery Institute, 2025g).

They distribute materials and generate wealth in alternative ways too (Discovery Institute, 2025h). DI sells books (e.g., Discovery Institute Press titles), curricula and educational materials (e.g., textbooks, workbooks, discussion guides), documentary DVDs and videos (e.g., *The Privileged Planet*, *Metamorphosis*, *The Intelligent Design Collection*), merchandise (e.g., mugs, posters, calendars, clothing), and online courses (e.g., DiscoveryU) (Ibid.).

So, a large board and staff, diverse events, and a clear Christian apologetic hermeneutic as a culture war organization presenting itself as a policy think-tank, as well as events and merchandise. Who finances the operation? It is a reasonable question.

One answer is donation (Discovery Institute, 2025i). DI offers general or program-specific giving, tiered memberships (e.g., Contributor, Discovery Society, Director's Circle, President's Circle), or planned giving, stock gifts, IRA distributions, and bequests (Ibid.).

Major documented funders include DonorsTrust ($9,352,000), National Christian Charitable Foundation ($7,376,750), Walton Family Foundation($400,000), Schwab Charitable Fund ($286,550), The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation ($260,000), The Seattle Foundation ($81,000), Searle Freedom Trust ($80,000), John Templeton Foundation ($78,750), Barney Family Foundation ($50,000), William H. Donner Foundation ($50,000), The Carthage Foundation ($40,000), Castle Rock Foundation ($25,000), Deramus Foundation ($15,000), Whatley Foundation ($11,000), Peterson Family Foundation ($3,670), Richard Seth Staley Educational Foundation ($3,000), Aequus Institute ($2,000), and Gilder Foundation ($1,000) (DeSmog, 2025).

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation provided approximately $1,000,000 per year for 10 years, totalling ~9.35 million dollars, with the stipulation that the funds be restricted to DI's Cascadia transportation/urban policy work (Ibid.).

They created several centers and a project: American Center for Transforming Education, Cascadia Center for Regional Development, Center for Natural and Artificial Intelligence, Center for Science and Culture, Center on Human Exceptionalism, Center on Wealth and Poverty, Chapman Center for Citizen Leadership, and Technology and Democracy Project.

American Center for Transforming Education is about K–12 policy advocacy (e.g., parental choice, innovation, "empower parents" framing) to transform" public education (2025). The Cascadia Center for Regional Development (2025) is a Pacific Northwest transportation and

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regional development policy. It backed Seattle's SR-99 deep-bore tunnel replacement for the Alaskan Way Viaduct (Ibid.).

The Center for Natural and Artificial Intelligence (Walter Bradley Center) looks at the AI's benefits/limits through a lens of human exceptionalism (echoed later) while contrasting human vs. machine intelligence (2025). The Center for Science and Culture is a central flagship for Intelligent Design advocacy, whether "academic freedom" campaigns for ID, education programs, or research (2025).

The Center on Human Exceptionalism has a bioethics focus with the explicit intent to defend human dignity as defined intrinsically, with a focus on assisted-suicide and euthanasia debates, and medical ethics (2025). While the Center on Wealth and Poverty emphasizes free-market economics messaging, they have a focus on homelessness, poverty, and work on critiques of progressive policy, previously led by Christopher Rufo (2025).

The Chapman Center for Citizen Leadership offers fellowships and hosts seminars to mentor young professionals, with a focus on civic leadership and public life (2025). Lastly, the Technology and Democracy Project focuses on tech/telecom policy from a market perspective, frequently opposing FCC-style net-neutrality philosophy (2025).

With these centers, projects, programs, events, donations, and funding, it represents a reasonably well-funded, long-term, and large-scale project devoted to pseudoscience as a 'policy think-tank,' but, rather, is a representative of a decades-long record of failures to advance ID Creationism.

These have continued since the mid-1990s. Unequivocally, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (2002), *Kitzmiller v. Dover* (2005) decision, the National Academy of Sciences (1999), and the National Science Teachers Association, and numerous others, have declared ID Creationism not science.

Indeed, the Wedge Document further illuminates DI's as a religious–cultural strategy rather than a scientific program. (National Center for Science Education, 2008). That's the Discovery Institute.

There's more, though, to be covered in the upcoming articles.

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Footnotes

[1] Serianna Anderson—Event and Donor Care Coordinator, Discovery Institute; Pam Bailey—Dallas Operations Manager, Discovery Institute Dallas; Steven J. Buri—President; Bruce Chapman—Chairman of the Board; Jonathan Choe—Journalist and Senior Fellow; Caitlin Cory—Communications Coordinator, Discovery Institute; Robert L. Crowther, II– Director of Communications, Center for Science & Culture; Steve Dilley—Academic Mentoring Centers Coordinator; Tova Forman—Development Specialist, Center for Science & Culture; Bruce Gordon—Associate Research Director, Center for Science & Culture; Keri D. Ingraham—

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Director, American Center for Transforming Education; Nathan Jacobson—Director of Media and Branding; Kate Kavanaugh—Education & Outreach Assistant, Center for Science & Culture; David Klinghoffer—Senior Fellow and Editor, Evolution News & Science Today, Center for Science & Culture; Casey Luskin—Associate Director, Center for Science & Culture; Andrew McDiarmid—Director of Podcasting, Senior Fellow; Jonathan McLatchie—Resident Biologist & Fellow; Elaine Meyer—Cambridge Project; Stephen C. Meyer—Director, Center for Science & Culture; Marsha Michaelis—Project Coordinator and Research Fellow, Fix Homelessness Initiative of Discovery Institute's Center on Wealth & Poverty; Brian Miller—Research Coordinator, Center for Science & Culture; Dan Nutley—Director, IT; Erik L. Nutley—Program Director; Daniel Reeves—Director, Education & Outreach; Emily Sandico—Special Projects Coordinator, Center for Science & Culture; Eric Schneider—Stewardship Officer, Major Gifts, Center for Science & Culture; Steve Schwarz—Director of Finance & Operations; Elliot Stephens– Development Assistant, Center for Science & Culture; Leslie Thompson—Finance Assistant; Kelley J. Unger—Director, Discovery Society, Center for Science & Culture; Andrea Waggoner—Donor Care Coordinator, Center for Science & Culture; John G. West—Vice President, Discovery Institute, and Managing Director, Center for Science & Culture; Katherine West—Web Developer and Data Administrator; Brian Westad—Business Manager and Executive Assistant to the Managing Director, Center for Science & Culture; Thomas Winkler—Regional Ambassador, Center for Science and Culture; Jonathan Witt—Executive Editor, Discovery Institute Press; Senior Fellow and Senior Project Manager, Center for Science & Culture; Penny Yeh—Web and Content Production Assistant.

See Discovery Institute (2025f).

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Omima Jabal on Sudan's Grassroots Humanitarian Response: ERR, USAID Cuts, and the Fight Against Misinformation

2025/08/22



Part 2 of 2

Omima Jabal, a Sudanese humanitarian, volunteer in the Emergency Response Room (ERR), a grassroots initiative providing critical aid during the war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Initially focused on disaster relief, ERR expanded its work in response to the war, providing food distribution, medical aid, and civilian protection while maintaining neutrality. In this 2-part interview, Jabal explains that USAID funding cuts have severely impacted local civil society organizations, forcing projects to freeze and depriving communities of essential food, medical care, and protection. This shortage intensifies resource scarcity, conflict, and human rights abuses. Despite challenges, grassroots and women-led groups continue coordinating aid and advocating for flexible international funding. Jabal calls for urgent policy changes to ensure humanitarian assistance reaches vulnerable Sudanese communities and supports local initiatives amid instability.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Large clusters of international organizations operate in crisis zones. These organizations can be massive and well-funded, but their size sometimes makes them inefficient for rapid response.

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They tend to be comprehensive and bold in their approaches, but are there any initiatives focusing on smaller, more agile groups—such as small cohorts of organizations working together instead of large networks? Would such a model be more responsive to the localized needs of the Sudanese people who are most affected?

Omima Jabal: That's right. Some smaller mechanisms do exist.

For example, UNICEF has worked in Sudan since the crisis began, focusing on aid, education, and substitution programs.

The World Food Programme (WFP) is also active. However, as I mentioned, one of the biggest challenges is that these large international organizations do not cover all parts of Sudan or engage the community at planning levels.

For instance, in the beginning, UNICEF operated only in the government-controlled zones controlled by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). Other areas were inaccessible, and UNICEF had no mechanism to work with them.

Later, UNICEF began collaborating with grassroots groups, which was an effective approach. Working through national organizations alongside grassroots groups demonstrated real impact. However, UNICEF has not yet engaged directly with grassroots groups to develop a tailored intervention strategy using smaller, more localized clusters.

The same is true for WFP. Due to the mandates and policies they follow, they face similar limitations. I previously emphasized that international organizations must improve coordination mechanisms within crisis zones.

They must become more creative and adaptive to the changing realities of Sudan, working in ways that respond flexibly to different regional needs.

Jacobsen: On a personal note, for those who want to know more about you as an individual—where do you find your strength? You are working under extreme circumstances. Some may find comfort in data and analysis; human rights discussions can be theoretical.

Jabal: Where do I find my strength? Strength comes from understanding the situation and its complexities, even within a single area. The situation in Sudan is not uniform—within one state, you will find vastly different conditions.

For example, we have worked in states where control is divided between two conflicting parties—some areas are controlled by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), while others are under the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

One key strength of grassroots groups is their accessibility. They have access to areas that even the government or international organizations cannot reach. Another source of strength is their deep understanding of the local context.

We understand why certain interventions fail, and others succeed and how to adapt to each situation. This knowledge is invaluable.

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Community accountability is another strength. Grassroots organizations are directly accountable to their communities, which builds trust. This level of accountability is not easily achieved, but it is crucial.

Lastly, grassroots groups have a strong reputation among the people they serve. This trust and credibility within their communities make their work more effective. So, yes, these are some key strengths that sustain us.

One of the major challenges we face is the spread of hate speech. The war on the ground is one thing, but the war on social media is another serious issue. Platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp are being used to spread misinformation and incite violence.

There have been cases where people were killed because of a video circulating online. This is a serious concern. One of our worries is the role of Meta, the company that owns Facebook and WhatsApp.

They have a fact-checking program, but it has many complications. One challenge is language. Hate speech often spreads in Sudanese Arabic dialects or specific tribal and regional languages, which are not always recognized by fact-checkers.

Another issue is transparency—we do not know how many fact-checkers Meta employs to monitor Sudan-related content or how effectively they prevent the spread of harmful speech. A recent U.S. government decision to halt Meta's fact-checking policies has made things even more difficult.

This has further reduced the ability to control the spread of misinformation and hate speech. The international community has not taken significant action on this issue. No concrete steps have been taken to address the harmful content spreading on social media, and this remains a serious and growing problem we face daily. I want to highlight that as one of the key challenges we are dealing with.

Jacobsen: Thank you. I appreciate your time again.

Jabal: Thank you so much, Scott.

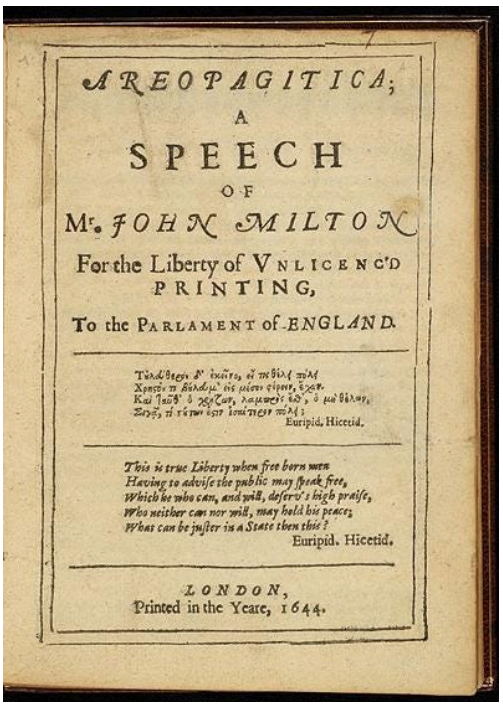
Jacobsen: You're welcome.

Jabal: It was nice talking to you. Have a good day.

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Areo Magazine (2016–2025): An Almost Decade of Ideas, Debate, and Cultural Commentary

2025/08/22



AREOPAGITICA;
A
SPEECH
OF
Mr. JOHN MILTON
For the Liberty of VNLICENC'D
PRINTING,
To the PARLAMENT of ENGLAND.

Τὰ δ' ἐκεῖνο, εἰ πᾶσι βίλ(πολ
Χρηστὰ π βελευμ' ἐς μέσον τίθητ', ἔχει.
Καὶ ταῦθ' ὁ χρήζων, λαμπρὸς ἐν, ὁ μὴ θέλων,
Σιγᾷ, τί τούτου ἔστ' ἐλευθερώτερον πόλ(;
Euripid. Hicetid.

This is true Liberty when free born men
Having to advise the public may speak free,
Which he who can, and will, deserv's high praise,
Who neither can nor will, may hold his peace;
What can be juster in a State then this?
Euripid. Hicetid.

LONDON,
Printed in the Yeare, 1644.

Once upon a time, Alan Sokal wrote a spoof paper in *Social Text* as a critique of postmodern-infected scholarship. In 2015, the idea of the replication crisis became mainstream, as an Open Science Collaboration *Science* paper presented non-replication in psychology widely, thus beginning an intensified debate on methods and rigour. That same year, Heterodox Academy was founded.

Heterodox Academy was created by Jonathan Haidt, Nicholas Quinn Rosenkranz, and Chris Martin due to concerns about campus orthodoxy and viewpoint diversity lacking. In August 2016, the University of Chicago Free Speech Letter (August 2016) was published as a pushback against perceived illiberal campus norms. In 2016, Peter Boghossian promoted the Atheos app for skeptical conversation in a civil tone with the Dawkins Foundation. This influenced the eventual liberal, humanist, and debate posture of *Areo Magazine*.

Areo was founded in November 2016 by Malhar Mali and named after Milton's *Areopagitica*. In May 2017, Boghossian & Lindsay placed a satirical paper, "The Conceptual Penis as a Social Construct," (May 19, 2017) in *Cogent Social Sciences* as part of a larger project or academic paper hoax.

By October 2-5, 2018, James Lindsay, Pluckrose, and Boghossian, worked on a hoax collectively known as "Sokal Squared" or the "Grievance Studies," revealed in an approximately 2-year research project involving the submission of bogus papers to critical theory or critical theory-

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associated journals. *The Atlantic* and *Chronicle* covered the "Sokal Squared" or the "Grievance Studies" hoax, while *Areo* provided an explanatory essay.

Dr. Iona Italia launched "Two for Tea" podcast. She would later become the Editor-in-Chief of *Areo*. "Two for Tea" ran through October/November 2023. On January 23, 2019, Areo Magazine Ltd. was registered in the UK (Company No. 11782240).

In 2020, Italia became the Editor-in-Chief. It was claimed somewhere between May 2020 and October 2023 that *Areo* garnered about 750,000 readers per year (not externally verified, but externally claimed). On August 25, 2020, Pluckrose and Lindsay published *Cynical Theories* as, in part, an extension of the thesis about activist scholarship.

Between April 6 and May 3, 2021, more formally, the leadership of *Areo* changed. Pluckrose stepped back from daily responsibilities. Companies House shows the person with significant control switched formally to Italia rather than merely informally. Aside from *Areo* happenings, Boghossian resigned from Portland State University between September 8 and 9, 2021, and published a resignation letter to coincide with this.

On January 19, 2022, Pluckrose is no longer a director, according to Companies House, while Italia was listed. In May 2023, Pluckrose's *Counterweight* project closed. Supporters were directed to other organizations. Later in 2023, *Areo*'s publications ceased, following Italia's tenure ending in October and the announcement of business operations closure on November 5, 2023.

In late 2023, *Quillette* began running the 'best of *Areo'* while Quillette purchased the archives of *Areo.* On January 21, 2025, the company, Areo Magazine Ltd., was formally dissolved (UK Companies House).

Areo rose from 2016 to 2019, peaked, probably, between 2020 and 2022, and experienced its denouement and closure phases from 2023 to 2025. Now, the figureheads Puckrose, Lindsay, Boghossian, Italia, and Mali have moved on.

Pluckrose has a Substack entitled *The Overflowings of a Liberal Brain* and published *The Counterweight Handbook* (2024) under Swift Press. Lindsay founded New Discourses as a media-education site. Boghossian is a Faculty Advisor at the University of Austin and hosts a YouTube/podcast series. Italia co-hosts *the Quillette* podcast and writes independently. Mali appears far less publicly since leaving *Areo*.

Sokal's original paper remains a point of academic and public discussion to this day.

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The International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design and Intelligent Design Creationism

2025/08/23



Previous articles in the series at the bottom.

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“The International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design (ISCID) herewith announces its formation and official launch. ISCID is a cross-disciplinary professional society that investigates complex systems apart from external programmatic constraints like materialism, naturalism, or reductionism. The society is fully web-driven and can be reached via the Internet at **http://www.iscid.org**.

The society provides a forum for formulating, testing, and disseminating research on complex systems through critique, peer review, and publication. Its aim is to pursue the theoretical development, empirical application, and philosophical implications of information- and design-theoretic concepts for complex systems.”

International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design

“*Progress in Complexity, Information, and Design* (*PCID*) is a quarterly, cross-disciplinary, online journal that investigates complex systems apart from external programmatic constraints like materialism, naturalism, or reductionism. *PCID* focuses especially on the theoretical

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development, empirical application, and philosophical implications of information- and design-theoretic concepts for complex systems. *PCID* welcomes survey articles, research articles, technical communications, tutorials, commentaries, book and software reviews, educational overviews, and controversial theories. The aim of *PCID* is to advance the science of complexity by assessing the degree to which teleology is relevant (or irrelevant) to the origin, development, and operation of complex systems."

Progress in Complexity, Information, and Design

"So in summary, what do we have? Firstly, neither Wells, Behe, Dembski nor Nelson appear to be currently publishing original research in mainstream scientific journals. Secondly, the research cited by ID supporters is not produced by ID supporters, and these authors do not see their research as supportive of the Discovery Institute's anti-evolutionary program. Lastly, *PCID*'s review system is unorthodox and has not yielded any substantive advances in scientific inquiry being largely philosophical discussions, anti-establishment rhetorical diatribes or rehersals [sic] of jaded arguments from probability."

John M. Lynch

Intelligent Design (ID) Creationism came to a head through The International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design (ISCID). For an Indian-based publication which I wrote almost 300 articles for it, ***News Intervention***, a decent article on the generic presentation of ISCID and more in-depth analysis of the publication record of PCID or the journal entitled *Progress in Complexity, Information, and Design* (PCID) is "**Excavation of a Failure: The International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design (ISCID)**" (Jacobsen, 2022).

The core conclusions from the analysis were that ID is rebranded Creationism, sharing the same theological roots in divine intervention and Christian hermeneutics, as evidenced by statements from its founders (Ibid.). Both Creationism and ID failed to garner legitimacy in academia, courts, culture, and science (Ibid.).

ID's architects openly tie the "Designer" to the Christian God and recast it in information-theory rhetoric (Ibid.). The Discovery Institute serves as the hub, with its leaders aging or dying without successors. Dembski left in 2016 but resurfaced around 2020 part-time and then more fully since 2021 (Science & Culture Today, 2021; Dembski, 2016), and the movement persists ideologically despite intellectual isolation (Jacobsen, 2022).

ISCID's journal PCID served as the publishing pipeline, characterized by lax/conflicted review, limited output (~70 pieces), and a teleological focus (Ibid.). PCID's activity faded after the 2005 Dover defeat (Ibid.).

The ID community is largely Euro-American Protestant men with advanced credentials, reflecting a sociopolitical project (Ibid.) and furthering the commentary in the prior pieces in this special series for *A Further Inquiry* and an archival piece for future curious audiences about the culture wars (not scientific, peer-reviewed intellectual combats) too (Ibid.).

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Therefore, ID/ISCID/PCID failed because the enterprise is theological in substance and lacks evidential, rigorous science. A more pointed analysis of PCID is available at "What was the Professional Output of Intelligent Design?" (Jacobsen, 2022b).

By its analysis at the time, PCID was the most professional effort of the ID movement through ISCID to produce actual scholarly output (Ibid.). PCID reflects ISCID wholeheartedly as a teleological emphasis while borrowing the terminology of information theory (Ibid.).

Governance and review were compromised as ISCID Fellows doubled as PCID's advisory/peer-review body (Ibid.). Publication could proceed with a single Fellow approval while under a concentrated editorial control, showcasing conflicts of interest and a weak formalization of rigour (Ibid.).

The total output was eight electronic issues from 2002-2005 with small or low-impact research outcomes (Ibid.). This is despite an extensive organization network, making PCID its flagship publication (Ibid.). As a research program attempt, PCID is a crucial archival representation of the failure of the ID research program (Ibid.).

As noted, there were 57 ISCID Fellows from a variety of academic disciplines and backgrounds. Let us do a coverage of them, as enough time has passed to see a then and now comparison and contrast. This will be an A to Z alphabetical listing by last name. This will be tedious, but necessary as an archival work and sourced from publicly available materials:

The ISCID Fellow is Bernard d'Abrera. Bernard d'Abrera (Australian lepidopterist and author associated with the Natural History Museum, London) died January 13, 2017. Michael Behe is in Biochemistry at Lehigh University. He is still a Professor of Biological Sciences at Lehigh University and a Senior Fellow at Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture (CSC).

John Bloom was a Professor of Physics & Philosophy of Science at Biola University. Now, he is Professor Emeritus of Physics at Biola University and the founding director of Biola's M.A. in Science & Religion.

Walter L. Bradley was in the Mechanical Engineering department at Texas A&M University. Now, he is dead, circa July 2, 2025. Neil Broom was in the department of Biophysics at the University of Auckland. Now, he is Emeritus Professor of Chemical & Materials Engineering at the University of Auckland.

J. Budziszewski was in the Department of Philosophy & Political Theory at the University of Texas–Austin. Now, he is a Professor of Government and Philosophy at UT Austin. John Angus Campbell was a Professor of Communications at the University of Memphis. Now, he is a Professor Emeritus of Communication at the University of Memphis.

Russell W. Carlson was a Professor of Molecular Biology at the University of Georgia (Athens). Now, he is on the Faculty or in a Director Emeritus role at UGA's Complex Carbohydrate Research Center.

David K. Y. Chiu was in the Department of Biocomputing at the University of Guelph. Now, he is Professor Emeritus in Computer Science at the University of Guelph. Robin Collins was in the

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Department of Cosmology & Philosophy of Physics at Messiah College. Now, he is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy & Department Chair at Messiah University.

William Lane Craig was in the Department of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology at Biola. Now, he is Emeritus Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot and leads Reasonable Faith. Kenneth de Jong was in the Department of Linguistics at Indiana University Bloomington. Now, he is a Professor of Linguistics at Indiana University.

William A. Dembski held various Mathematics roles while focusing as an independent. Now, he is a technology entrepreneur, a Founding/Senior Fellow of the Discovery Institute CSC and an active writer. Mark R. Discher was in the Department of Ethics at the University of St. Thomas. Now, he is a Theology/Ethics educator, e.g., Kino Catechetical Institute.

Daniel Dix was in the Department of Mathematics at the University of South Carolina. He was Professor Emeritus at USC. Now, he is dead circa 2023. Fred Field was in the Department of Linguistics at California State University. Now, he is Professor Emeritus at California State University, Northridge.

Guillermo Gonzalez was in the Department of Astronomy at Iowa State University. Now, he is a Research Scientist (Physics & Astronomy) at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Bruce L. Gordon was in the Department of Philosophy of Physics at Baylor University. Now, he is Professor of the History & Philosophy of Science at Saint Constantine College (Houston) and has taught at Houston Christian University (formerly HBU).

David Humphreys was in the Department of Chemistry at McMaster University. Now, he is an emeritus or retired academic. Any public updates are limited to legacy profiles. Cornelius Hunter was in the Department of Biophysics at Seagull Technology. Now, he is a Discovery Institute Fellow who has been an engineer/scientist with industry roles. Any public updates are sparse.

Muzaffar Iqbal was in Science & Religion at the Center for Islam and Science. Now, he is the President of the Center for Islamic Sciences (Canada) and is the editor of the *Integrated Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*. Quinn Tyler Jackson was in Language & Software Systems independently. Now, he is a writer/technologist and listed with The Writers' Union of Canada.

Conrad Johanson was in the Department of Clinical Neurosciences & Physiology at Brown Medical School. Now, he is Professor Emeritus at Brown University. Robert Kaita was in the Department of Plasma Physics at Princeton University. Then he was Researcher/Emeritus-affiliated at Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory. Now, he is retired.

James P. Keener was in the Department of Mathematics & Bioengineering at the University of Utah. Now, he is the Distinguished Professor Emeritus in Mathematics at the University of Utah. Robert C. Koons was in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Texas–Austin. Now, he is a Professor of Philosophy at UT Austin. Younghun Kwon was in the Department of Physics at Hanyang University. Now, he is a Professor of Physics at Hanyang University (quantum information/AMO).

Christopher Michael Langan is the founder and President of the Mega Foundation (1999). He published his 56-page CTMU paper, "The Cognitive-Theoretic Model of the Universe: A New

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Kind of Reality Theory" (2002) in PCID. Now, he continues research work through the Mega Foundation, as a self-described "reality theorist." Robert Larmer was in the Department of Philosophy at the University of New Brunswick. Now, he is a Professor & Department Chair in Philosophy at UNB Philosophy and the President of the Canadian Society of Christian Philosophers.

Matti Leisola was in the Department of Bioprocess Engineering at the Helsinki University of Technology. Now, he is a Professor Emeritus at Aalto University (formerly HUT). E. Stan Lennard was in the Department of Medicine at the University of Washington. Now, he is a retired surgeon/clinical professor. Any updated information is sparse. John Lennox was in the Department of Mathematics at the University of Oxford. Now, he is an Emeritus Professor of Mathematics & Fellow Emeritus at Green Templeton College, University of Oxford.

Gina Lynne LoSasso was qualified in Cognitive Neuroscience & Clinical Neuropsychology and worked with Christopher Michael Langan through the Mega Foundation & its Research Group. Now, she maintains an executive role with the Mega Foundation.

Jed Macosko was in the Department of Chemistry at La Sierra University. Now, he is a Professor of Physics at Wake Forest University and the President/Co-founder of AcademicInfluence.com. Bonnie Mallard was in the Department of Immunology at the University of Guelph. Now, she is a Professor in Pathobiology at the University of Guelph and is the inventor of HIR/Immunity+ livestock health technology.

Forrest M. Mims III was involved in Atmospheric Science research. Now, he continues atmospheric measurements and science writing. Scott Minnich was in the Department of Microbiology at the University of Idaho. Now, he is a Professor of Microbiology at the University of Idaho.

Paul Nelson was involved in the Philosophy of Biology at the Discovery Institute. Now, he is a Senior Fellow at the Discovery Institute's Center for Science & Culture. Filip Palda was in the Department of Economics at ÉNAP (Montréal). Now, he is dead, circa 2017.

Edward T. Peltzer III was associated with Ocean Chemistry and later affiliated with MBARI. Now, he is retired from MBARI and is a long-time Senior Research Specialist/Program Manager. Alvin Plantinga was in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. Now, he is the John A. O'Brien Professor Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame.

Martin Poenie was in the Department of Molecular Cell & Developmental Biology at the University of Texas–Austin. Then he was a Retired/emeritus professor. Now, he is retired. Carlos E. Puente was in the Department of Hydrology & Theoretical Dynamics at the University of California, Davis. Now, he is a Professor Emeritus at UC Davis.

Del Ratzsch was in the Department of Philosophy of Science at Calvin College. Now, he is a Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Calvin University. Jay Wesley Richards was involved in Philosophical Theology at the Discovery Institute. Now, he is a Senior Fellow/Director for The Heritage Foundation and a Professor at The Catholic University of America.

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Terry Rickard was involved in Electrical Engineering at Orincon Corporation. Now, he is a senior technologist/executive, co-founded ORINCON, and has later roles at OptiMark and Lockheed Martin. John Roche was in the Department of History of Science at the University of Oxford. Now, he is dead, circa May 20, 2024 (Harris Manchester College, 2025).

Andrew Ruys was involved in Bioceramic Engineering at the University of Sydney. Now, he is a Professor of Engineering at the University of Sydney. Henry F. Schaefer III was involved in Quantum Chemistry at the University of Georgia (Athens). Now, he is the Graham Perdue Professor of Chemistry & Director of the Center for Computational Quantum Chemistry at the University of Georgia (Athens).

Jeffrey M. Schwartz, M.D., was involved in the Department of Psychiatry/Neuroscience at UCLA. Now, he is a Research Psychiatrist at UCLA and is an author on neuroplasticity/OCD. Philip S. Skell was involved in the Department of Chemistry at Penn State University. Now, he is dead, circa November 21, 2010.

Frederick Skiff was in the Department of Physics at the University of Iowa. Now, he is a professor of Physics & Astronomy at the University of Iowa. Karl D. Stephan was involved in the Department of Electrical Engineering at Southwest Texas State University. Now, he is a Professor at Texas State University, an engineering-ethics writer.

Richard M. Sternberg was involved in Systematics at NCBI-GenBank (NIH). Now, he is an independent/ID-affiliated scholar with no current formal institutional role publicly listed. Frank J. Tipler was involved in the Department of Mathematical Physics at Tulane University. Now, he is still a Professor of Mathematical Physics at Tulane University.

Jonathan Wells was involved in Developmental Biology at the Discovery Institute. Now, he is dead, September 19, 2024 (Klinghoffer, 2024). Peter Zöller-Greer was involved in Mathematics, Physics, and Information Science at the State University of Applied Sciences (Frankfurt/Main). Now, he is Professor/emeritus-level at Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, but retired.

Therefore, 7 former ISCID Fellows are deceased: Bernard d'Abrera (Jan 13, 2017), Walter L. Bradley (July 2, 2025), Daniel Dix (July 3, 2023), Filip Palda (Aug 24, 2017), John J. Roche (May 20, 2024), Philip S. Skell (Nov 21, 2010), and Jonathan Wells (Sept 19, 2024).

13 are some form of emeritus: John Bloom, Neil Broom, John Angus Campbell, Russell W. Carlson, William Lane Craig, Fred Field, James P. Keener, Matti Leisola, John Lennox, Carlos E. Puente, Del Ratzsch, Alvin Plantinga, and David Humphreys.

Five are explicitly retired: E. Stan Lennard, Edward T. Peltzer III, Martin Poenie, Peter Zöller-Greer, and Robert Kaita. Therefore, 25 Fellows are deceased, emeritus, or retired (accounting for overlap), leaving 32 with current active roles; categories were active, deceased, emeritus (still publishing/teaching), retired (no ongoing academic appointment), and unknown/insufficient public information.

The transitions never happened after PCID and ISCID became defunct. ID Creationism's most significant achievement in an attempt at academic legitimation eventuated in this outcome for

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itself. This legacy has significantly influenced the intellectual lives of numerous individuals. It is one of those rare phenomena: a forever-after reputational scar.

As noted previously, there are other organizations and individuals to cover.

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Footnotes

[1] Fellows of ISCID:

1. d'Abrera, Bernard
2. Behe, Michael J.
3. Bloom, John
4. Bradley, Walter
5. Broom, Neil
6. Budziszewski, J.
7. Campbell, John Angus
8. Carlson, Russell W.
9. Chiu, David K. Y.
10. Collins, Robin

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11. Craig, William Lane
12. de Jong, Kenneth
13. Dembski, William A.
14. Discher, Mark R.
15. Dix, Daniel
16. Field, Fred
17. Gonzalez, Guillermo
18. Gordon, Bruce L.
19. Humphreys, David
20. Hunter, Cornelius
21. Iqbal, Muzaffar
22. Jackson, Quinn Tyler
23. Johanson, Conrad
24. Kaita, Robert
25. Keener, James
26. Koons, Robert C.
27. Kwon, Younghun
28. Langan, Christopher Michael
29. Larmer, Robert
30. Leisola, Matti
31. Lennard, Stan
32. Lennox, John
33. LoSasso, Gina Lynne
34. Macosko, Jed
35. Mallard, Bonnie
36. Mims, Forrest M. III
37. Minnich, Scott
38. Nelson, Paul
39. Palda, Filip
40. Peltzer, Edward T.
41. Plantinga, Alvin

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42. Poenie, Martin
43. Puente, Carlos E.
44. Ratzsch, Del
45. Richards, Jay Wesley
46. Rickard, Terry
47. Roche, John
48. Ruys, Andrew
49. Schaefer, Henry F.
50. Schwartz, Jeffrey M.
51. Skell, Philip
52. Skiff, Frederick
53. Stephan, Karl D.
54. Sternberg, Richard
55. Tipler, Frank
56. Wells, Jonathan
57. Zöller-Greer, Peter

See International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design (2013).

Other A Further Inquiry Series articles

Intelligent Design Creationism's Fall from Grace (2025.08.19)

Architects of Intelligent Design Creationism, Then and Now (2025.08.20)

The Discovery Institute and Intelligent Design Creationism (2025.08.21)

The International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design and Intelligent Design Creationism (2025.08.22)

Other Previous Articles

22% of Canadians believe God created humans as is ~10,000 years ago (2018.04.30)

Creationism and Evolution — Bill HB258 Denied (2018.05.01)

About One in Five Canadians are Young Earth Creationists (2018.05.01)

See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil: Monkey See, Monkey Do, Monkey Hearsay (2019.04.06)

Canadians' and Others' Convictions to Divine Interventionism in the Matters of the Origins and Evolution (2019.10.12)

Canada: Division over role of religion in Canadian society (2019.12.17)

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The Fantastic Capacity for Believing the Incredible (2020.11.01)

What was the Professional Output of Intelligent Design? (2022.01.28)

Excavation of a Failure: The International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design (ISCID) (2022.01.29)

What was the Professional Output of Intelligent Design? (2022.04.06)

Interview with Ann Reid — Executive Director, National Center for Science Education (2022.05.03)

An Interview with Imam Soharwardy on Creationism, Evolution, and Islam (2023.02.14)

An Interview with Professor Michael Ruse, Florida State University — Part Two (2023.02.16)

Support for evolution stable in Canada (2024.05.26)

@rationalchristianfaith, "Logan Paul Cliffe Knechtle: Does The Bible Support Evolution?" (2024.06.18)

Creationism at a new low, according to Gallup (2024.08.01)

Glenn Branch on the Scopes Trial in Books (2024.11.07)

Nathan H. Lents on Gender Diversity, Evolution, and Science (2025.03.22)

How Creationism and Intelligent Design Undermine Canadian Science Education: The Trinity Western University Case (2025.04.01)

Exploring Creationist Beliefs in Canada: An Analysis of Perspectives on Origins and Evolution (2025.08.15)

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Sudan’s Economic Struggles & Conflict Dynamics

2025/08/23



Part 1 of 2

Eddie Thomas, a researcher specializing in Sudan and South Sudan, discusses the transition from subsistence farming to market economies, the impact of conflict, and healthcare inequalities. In this 2-part interview, he examines how wars have disrupted traditional kinship networks, pushing people into market dependency. South Sudan’s caloric intake has dropped, leading to malnutrition. Sudan’s healthcare disparities stem from colonial-era spatial inequalities and privatization. Border conflicts like Kafia-Kingi influence economic dynamics, and kinship networks are under pressure. Thomas advocates for universal healthcare and decommodification as solutions to economic instability and conflict. He acknowledges Sudanese revolutionaries striving for systemic change.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Eddie Thomas. He is a researcher specializing in Sudan and South Sudan. He has previously been affiliated with the Rift Valley Institute and XCEPT. Currently, he works with the ATAR Network. He has two decades of experience as a teacher, human rights worker, and researcher. He examines border conflicts, healthcare inequalities, and economic transformation. He has authored *South Sudan: A Slow Liberation* and reports such as *Moving Towards Markets* and *The Future of Sudan’s Shattered Health System*. His research, previously supported by the XCEPT program and the Rift Valley Institute, explored the consequences of market dependence, conflict-driven social shifts, and healthcare privatization in Sudan’s shifting and evolving political landscape.

Thank you for joining me today. My first question is: How has the transition from subsistence farming to market dependence in South Sudan affected local economies and social structures?

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Eddie Thomas: Subsistence is a term many people still use to describe agriculture in South Sudan. It is a peculiar term that arose during the Enlightenment and was the opposite of a new concept: improved agriculture, capitalist agriculture, agriculture for profit and high yield. Subsistence was used to describe forms of agriculture that were not oriented toward maximizing yield but rather toward managing consumption.

The subsistence systems in South Sudan were long-lived. They have only started to decline over the past 20 or 30 years. Even now, they are not defunct but are deteriorating. Before this shift, people primarily produced food for consumption or exchange within their social networks. They organized production around social relationships rather than markets.

This meant that people did not necessarily seek to maximize surplus or yield but considered other factors now recognized as equally important—such as sustainability, climate and ecological adaptation, and flavour and nutrition. These factors influenced agricultural production decisions.

However, South Sudan has experienced near-continuous conflict since the 19th century, particularly during the Turco-Egyptian rule and later under British colonial administration. It has had only brief periods of peace. War is a significant reorganizer of society and production. It is also an effective means of instilling a profit motive in people, as it introduces intense coercion to reshape society.

That is what happened in South Sudan. Wars gradually detached people from the land where they produced food, grew grain, kept livestock, or fished in rivers. These conflicts transformed them into something different. Initially, they might have become enslaved persons or military recruits —who were not much different from enslaved persons—or what are now referred to as displaced people, those forced off their land and compelled to live in unsuitable and uncomfortable conditions.

And all of these factors limited the ability of kinship networks and other social structures to survive and organize production. At the same time, people's ability to manage their production was being undermined.

Other factors were coming into play. New groups of people were not interested in market commodities a hundred years ago. People didn't seek to save money to buy available goods. Basic commodities such as soap or fishhooks were available but not central to people's lives. However, the allure of commodities has grown significantly. Now, people desire handbags, stylish shoes, fashionable clothing, and smartphones.

People are increasingly drawn into market economies and commodities while facing new threats to their ability to remain on the land. Climate change has severely affected South Sudan, which is ecologically sensitive. The levels of flooding along major rivers and waterways are alarming. Some individuals are forced to reconsider their home locations due to the risk of flooding. Others must reconsider their livelihoods, as they can no longer sustain farming or herding. As a result, many are switching to fishing as a means of survival, adapting to the climate-induced displacement they are experiencing.

What has happened is that an older system—one not designed for maximizing profit or yield but rather focused on maintaining social and kinship networks—has been disrupted. This traditional

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system provided multiple layers of meaning to life through production. Work was once deeply tied to one's sense of family, home, and even cultural traditions, such as the songs people sang while working.

I'm not trying to sentimentalize the past or suggest it was the only way of life. There were negative aspects to the "good old days." However, the kinship-based and socially networked production systems helped hold society together. Today, many pressures on South Sudanese people are forcing them apart, breaking down social cohesion, and pushing them into fragmented, often antagonistic, enclaves.

One of the things I examined was how conflict is as much tied to these ongoing agrarian changes as it is to ethnicity or other cultural explanations sometimes given for violence. The countryside is undergoing a massive transformation, and this upheaval has become entangled with the conflict, potentially fueling its continuation.

Let me explain why. The first scientific nutrition studies in South Sudan were conducted in the 1950s by Gertrude Culwick, an English researcher employed by the colonial government. She conducted multiple studies in different parts of Sudan. Her work in the floodplains—vast, flat, muddy lands on the east and west of the Jebel, where the White Nile flows through South Sudan on its way north—revealed interesting findings. She found that people consumed between 2,000 and 3,500 calories per day, a substantial intake. However, the measures she used then differed from the ones we use today.

Because today, caloric intake would be averaged out, considering age differences and other factors. Gertrude Culwick may have used specific measurement criteria. However, adults in her studies still consumed a substantial amount of food.

Some studies suggest that people in South Sudan consume an average of 1,500 to 1,800 calories per day in the 21st century. This marks a dramatic reduction in caloric intake over the past 60 to 70 years. One key aspect of this transition is that it is a hungry transition. It may eventually lead to obesity, as market-based food systems have in many other countries, but at present, it is leading to undernourishment and malnutrition.

There is no direct link between marketization and better food systems. On the contrary, marketization—alongside war, displacement, and other disruptions—is not resulting in better nutrition. Instead, it is driving an increased demand for cash. In the past, many South Sudanese lived with minimal reliance on money, and it wasn't easy during the colonial period to get people to work for wages because they simply did not need cash. Additionally, they did not wear clothes with pockets, making it impractical to carry money.

The colonial administration introduced money taxes to compel people to work for wages. As a result, people would perform a few days of labour annually to pay their taxes. Over time, market dependence increased, and people needed money not just for taxes but also for new necessities such as modern education and healthcare, both of which required cash. Additionally, they began to need money for food as they transitioned from solely producing food to selling portions and later repurchasing food from merchants once their stocks ran low. Essentially, their food supplies were becoming commodities.

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I found an interesting trend in household surveys—though they are infrequent in South Sudan and must be interpreted cautiously. Surveys conducted during the peace years from 2006 to 2013 suggested that while many areas shifted toward market-based economies, many people reported that they had not used cash in the past seven days. This indicates a growing reliance on cash without consistent access to it.

In the areas where hunger was most prevalent, people needed money to buy food but often did not have it. These were the same areas where militia groups were gaining strength, and young men increasingly turned to alternative forms of work that provided access to cash or coercive means of obtaining resources they could no longer produce themselves. The militia system played a crucial role in dismantling traditional production methods and was instrumental in sustaining this economic transition. As workers defected from productive labour to military employment, money circulated more through soldiers than through conventional economic activity.

As hunger intensified, the need for money grew, pushing people into new methods of obtaining it, including selling labour and sending their sons to fight. This transformation perpetuated economic instability and reinforced the cycle of displacement and market dependence.

People also invested heavily in educating their children because they believed education was essential for navigating the emerging economy. Even families with very little money would sell their labour to afford school fees, hoping that education, even in under-resourced schools, could provide their children with a better future.

South Sudan’s progression toward a market economy is an important study area because it sheds light on how the rural crisis underpins many ongoing challenges. This rural crisis is sometimes misrepresented as a conflict between antagonistic ethnic groups, as that provides a simplistic explanation. However, the reality is more complex. The government, unable to adequately serve its people, often exacerbates divisions by taking resources away in a discriminatory manner rather than providing for its citizens. This creates friction among communities and pushes individuals into armed groups.

Focusing less on the military and more on the agricultural sector would help me better understand South Sudan’s challenges.

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Sudan and South Sudan: Subsistence Farming, Market Economies, Conflict, and Healthcare Inequality

2025/08/24



Part 2 of 2

Eddie Thomas, a researcher specializing in Sudan and South Sudan, discusses the transition from subsistence farming to market economies, the impact of conflict, and healthcare inequalities. In this 2-part interview, he examines how wars have disrupted traditional kinship networks, pushing people into market dependency. South Sudan's caloric intake has dropped, leading to malnutrition. Sudan's healthcare disparities stem from colonial-era spatial inequalities and privatization. Border conflicts like Kafia-Kingi influence economic dynamics, and kinship networks are under pressure. Thomas advocates for universal healthcare and decommodification as solutions to economic instability and conflict. He acknowledges Sudanese revolutionaries striving for systemic change.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What are the key drivers behind Sudan's healthcare inequalities? Are these comparable to those of other countries, or are their causes and characteristics unique?

Eddie Thomas: Sudan's inequalities are well known and have multiple dimensions. One of the most significant factors is spatial inequality. Some regions benefit from Sudan's merchant and trade systems, where the wealthier populations reside and have access to services. Then, some regions generate wealth for these merchant systems—through agriculture, gold mining, oil extraction, and food production—yet remain significantly disadvantaged.

Most of this wealth-generating activity occurs far from the centers of trade. Historically, Sudan's economic hub has been around Khartoum. At the same time, peripheral areas have suffered from lower life expectancy, higher child mortality rates, and other indicators of material disadvantage.

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These disparities were entrenched during the 19th century due to colonial aggression and the arbitrary drawing of colonial borders, which heavily favoured the central regions.

The healthcare system that emerged under these conditions had serious shortcomings. There was a strong bias toward providing better healthcare in wealthier regions, with greater access to medical personnel and facilities. In contrast, poorer regions suffered from stark disparities in mortality rates, particularly infant and child mortality.

Furthermore, Sudan's healthcare system has historically been skewed towards curative rather than preventative care. Those living in the capital could access expensive medical procedures. At the same time, those in remote areas often lacked access to vaccines or basic preventative medicine. This structural imbalance has persisted, reinforcing the country's deep-seated healthcare access and outcomes inequalities.

After the end of the colonial period, there was a global movement toward primary healthcare, aiming to expand medical services to poor and marginalized communities. The goal was to provide the best possible healthcare for all, leading to the development of some health facilities in underserved peripheral regions. There was also an effort to improve healthcare access for economically disadvantaged populations. Sudan had significant social inequalities, with rich and poor people living side by side in cities. This movement gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s.

However, by the 1980s, a global financial crisis caused a significant shift in the financial landscape. One of the outcomes was a severe debt crisis across Africa. Many governments have been encouraged to take out loans to build productive infrastructure and social welfare services, including healthcare. Right-wing economic policies advocating for privatization gained prominence when the debt crisis struck. These policies argued that people should not expect free healthcare, leading to declining public health services.

During this period, Sudan initially experienced some growth in healthcare access, and free services were available in many places. When I first visited Sudan, one could walk into a healthcare facility and receive basic treatment, such as a bandage, without charge. However, this changed drastically in the 1990s when a new military government took over. Adopting hyper-privatization and austerity measures, they systematically cut back public health services.

A weak, developing healthcare system came under immense strain. Additionally, the government initiated conflicts in many regions where they imposed austerity, as such policies often required coercion and repression. This further eroded the health system. By the early 21st century, Sudan's healthcare had become highly privatized and heavily concentrated in Khartoum, which retained the majority of medical personnel.

Most Sudanese doctors sought better opportunities abroad, particularly in Saudi Arabia or the UK. Those who remained in Sudan preferred working in private hospitals in major cities, where they could earn a livable wage, rather than in underfunded public hospitals in rural areas, where salaries ranged between $50 and $200 per month—insufficient for someone who had endured the rigorous training required for a medical career.

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As a result, Sudan developed a highly centralized healthcare system focused on Khartoum, making access to medical services in other regions extremely difficult. When Khartoum fell in April 2023, this unequal system was effectively decapitated. Most specialist hospitals, clustered around the presidential palace where intense fighting occurred, were forced to shut down, leaving only a few operational facilities.

Healthcare provision then shifted into two main spheres. On one hand, private actors relocated their services outside of Khartoum. On the other hand, grassroots emergency response groups emerged during the 2018–2019 revolution and stepped in to provide urgent medical care. These mutual aid organizations had pioneered self-help models, running emergency rooms nationwide. However, they were ill-equipped to handle the massive healthcare crisis. Their resources were scarce, medical buildings were destroyed, and doctors were arrested and tortured.

Despite their efforts, these groups faced overwhelming challenges and became key targets of government repression during this turbulent period.

Jacobsen: How have cross-border conflicts and territorial disputes, such as the Kafia-Kingi enclave, shaped some of the political-economic dynamics of the region?

Thomas: I worked on Kafia-Kingi a few years ago but am unaware of recent developments except through friends and other contacts. However, Sudan and South Sudan have a relatively unique set of border conflicts because they are both recent and unresolved. Border disputes exist across Africa—there is a contested triangle on the Egypt-Sudan border and another between South Sudan and Kenya, where different interpretations exist regarding ownership.

Often, the more powerful state maintains control over disputed enclaves. This has been the case along much of the Sudan-South Sudan border, where Sudan, with its larger population, military, and financial resources, has retained its presence in key border areas.

Not all border disputes are resolved through war. Most are long-term disputes that gradually get negotiated. Sudan has maintained control over Kafia-Kingi, a mineral-rich enclave South of Darfur, which, by legal standards, should have been ceded to South Sudan in 2011. The rules established that areas administered by southern provinces in 1936 would remain part of South Sudan. However, Kafia-Kingi was the largest land area transferred from South Sudanese to North Sudanese provincial administration, an early post-independence decision.

There were several reasons for this transfer. Kafia-Kingi was sparsely populated, making it a difficult area to govern. Additionally, its mineral wealth made it highly valuable, prompting authorities in Khartoum to exercise greater control over the region.

When South Sudan gained independence, border enclaves became one of the many unresolved issues negotiators had to address. Other complex matters included national debt allocation, ownership of embassies such as the one in Nairobi, and South Sudanese citizens' status in Sudan. These were sensitive topics requiring significant compromise.

As a result, negotiations on border enclaves were indefinitely postponed, and it is likely to take a long time before any resolution is reached.

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Kafia-Kingi is particularly significant because it borders the Central African Republic and Chad. Despite being a remote and sparsely populated area, it has become a hotbed of activity due to arms trafficking, gold smuggling, and the presence of various outlaw groups.

It is now a highly contested zone, as one of the major gold mines fueling the war in Sudan is located within the enclave. The ongoing conflict between the Rapid Support Forces, the military, and their respective allies is partly driven by control over these gold resources.

Unfortunately, this beautiful and remote forested region has been brutally drawn into the turmoil of modern geopolitics, with its resources becoming central to an increasingly violent conflict.

Jacobsen: What are the major challenges foreign-funded healthcare initiatives face in Sudan? Supply chains, delivery, application, things of this nature.

Thomas: Foreign funding does not constitute a significant portion of Sudan's healthcare economy. The most recent national health accounts, published about six years ago, estimated that foreign funding accounted for approximately 5% of the country's total healthcare costs. Much of this funding came from global philanthro-capitalist organizations, such as the Gates Foundation and Gavi, which focused on vertical programs.

Vertical programs allocate funds for specific interventions—such as vaccines or malaria nets—rather than supporting comprehensive healthcare systems. While these programs can lead to progress on urgent public health challenges, they are limited in scope. Effective healthcare requires addressing multiple needs simultaneously, and vertical programs do not always integrate well with broader health initiatives. For example, malaria nets alone are insufficient in communities facing malnutrition, infectious diseases, and epidemic outbreaks.

Most foreign-funded healthcare in Sudan was channelled through the Ministry of Health, which managed the distribution of funds and resources. However, with the government's collapse, these funds' status remains uncertain. Efforts have been made to transition toward UN funding mechanisms. However, coordination with the Ministry of Health is still necessary at some level, as it maintains connections across the country.

The volume of foreign aid has likely contracted, given the logistical challenges of transferring funds, purchasing medical supplies, and distributing goods within Sudan. Though I do not have precise figures, I suspect foreign funding has not increased. An increasingly significant element of foreign-funded healthcare is diaspora remittances, which support emergency rooms providing critical care across Sudan.

Jacobsen: What about kinship networks in Sudan and South Sudan's economies? Are these scaled in a way that helps at least some of the population and mitigates healthcare gaps?

Thomas: Kinship networks exist everywhere, don't they? Powerful figures like Mr. Trump have kinship networks even in the United States. They are an integral part of social organization.

Economic and social life was historically structured around kinship-based production systems in many places. However, not all social orders were strictly kinship-based. Production was sometimes organized around alternative social networks, such as age groups. These networks

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were not necessarily based on family ties but on individuals coming of age together in a specific place—a pattern seen in many societies worldwide.

You see these types of networks everywhere—think of school reunions. People still attend them as useful networking events. For example, Harvard alums often connect with fellow graduates to secure job opportunities.

These networks have always existed, but previously, labour was not mobilized through markets. Instead, it was organized through reciprocal obligations that weren't formally tracked or bartered. Let's say, Scott, that you invite me for dinner tomorrow, then again the following week, and a couple of weeks later, a third time. I wouldn't write you a check saying I owe you a dinner, but after the third invitation, I would likely feel an implicit obligation to return the favour. You, too, might expect that I reciprocate in some way.

That is a better way of understanding how these economies function than the concept of barter, which is largely an invention of right-wing economists who misunderstand social reciprocity. If you've invited me multiple times, I should contribute something. If you are significantly wealthier than me, I may not invite you back to my home out of embarrassment. Still, I will find another way to reciprocate—perhaps by helping you in some other manner.

These networks, however, are under immense pressure as people increasingly need money. Many are forced to relocate, live in refugee camps, or seek safety in displacement camps. In such environments, individuals must sell their labour and endure harsh conditions. The freedom to choose is greatly diminished, and they must adhere to external demands rather than act according to their social obligations.

Jacobsen: To move into a more constructive discussion, what policy recommendations could mitigate economic commodification and conflict in Sudan's healthcare system or South Sudan?

Thomas: If you want a policy recommendation, why not aim for a global free healthcare system modelled after Canada or Cuba? If discussing real solutions, why not advocate for a universal healthcare system?

People are under tremendous pressure to access healthcare and education, enduring significant hardships to obtain these basic needs. Nearly everyone would prefer free healthcare and education. Suppose wealthy countries do not want people migrating across their borders. Why not invest in comprehensive social services in their home countries? By fully decommodifying healthcare and education, you incentivize people to remain in their communities rather than seek opportunities elsewhere.

That is a genuine policy recommendation. There are other policy approaches, but I often see them as non-solutions. For example, some propose micro-enterprise programs to empower women—yet these initiatives often result in marginal economic gains, with individuals earning just a few dollars a month. These approaches fail to address the root causes of economic disparity and healthcare inequity.

Those are the policy prescriptions of the aid industry, but they have been tried before.

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Jacobsen: Do you have any comments on Omer Al-Bashir's impact on healthcare access or medical services, particularly in rural areas?

Thomas: He was an arch-neoliberal, managing healthcare in rural areas accordingly.

Jacobsen: Who do you think is leading, organizationally or individually, a positive collective movement toward a better future for Sudan? Who is working towards reducing human rights abuses, improving healthcare, and ensuring people's needs are met?

Thomas: Sudan has undergone a revolution. Brilliant revolutionaries have eloquently articulated Sudan's crisis and proposed practical solutions. They have devised models of decommodified healthcare in a highly commodified healthcare environment. These individuals and movements are leading the way, and people should pay attention to what they have to say.

Jacobsen: Excellent. Eddie, I have no more questions. Thank you very much for your time today. It was nice to meet you.

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Biologic Institute, Douglas Axe, and Intelligent Design Creationism

2025/08/25



Previous articles in the series, and others, at the bottom.

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“Biologic Institute is a non-profit research organization founded in 2005 for the purpose of developing a new approach to biology. Thanks to technological advances, the life sciences have become very effective at acquiring facts. What they need now is a theoretical foundation that makes sense of these facts. Some still claim that Darwin’s theory does just that, but the ongoing struggle to make sense of genomic data (for example) indicates otherwise.

Scientists affiliated with Biologic Institute are working from the idea that life appears to have been designed because it really *was* designed. That’s a hypothesis, not a theory, and while it obviously has huge philosophical implications (made even more huge by the the [sic] fact it appears to be correct) it doesn’t do much for biology if left at that.”

Biologic Institute

“The Intelligent Design creationists have also put up a simulacrum, the Biologic Institute, with fume hoods and white lab coats, from which they hope to summon scientific credibility. They’ve also been fooled into thinking the appearance is the same as the substance.

Since literal Cargo Cultists aren’t a significant presence in the US, but creationists are, I suggest we appropriate this holiday and call it Intelligent Design Day. Don’t worry about going to any effort to celebrate it, though—all you have to do is *pretend* that you are celebrating it, just as the Intelligent Design creationists pretend that they’re doing science.”

P.Z. Myers (2007)

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“Big Intelligent Design may be following the path blazed by Big Tobacco.”

Reason Magazine (2007)

After the fall of The International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design (Jacobsen, 2025) and its journal *Progress in Complexity, Information, and Design* (PCID), around 2005, another institution emerged out of the Discovery Institute (DI) community for Intelligent Design (ID) Creationism research, the Biologic Institute (2025a)–a U.S. 501(c)(3).

Douglas Axe was the founding scientific lead of Biologic Institute in 2005 (Biologic Institute, 2025a; Discovery Institute, 2025). Established in 2005 and largely funded through grants associated with Discovery Institute’s Center for Science and Culture; DI materials and BI’s own pages document close organizational ties (2025). Their leadership was comprised of 17 affiliates as of last listing: Douglas Axe, Günter Bechly, Stuart Burgess, Brendan Dixon, Winston Ewert, Ann Gauger, Guillermo Gonzalez, David Keller, Matti Leisola, Philip Lu, Robert J. Marks II, Brian Miller, Colin Reeves, Mariclair Reeves, Richard Sternberg, Jonathan Wells, and Lisanne Winslow (Biologic Institute, 2025b).

The established ideological grounding was ID Creationism (Cartwright, 2006). They wanted to challenge mainstream evolutionary biology primarily with appointments (Biever, 2006). The aim was to demonstrate a design perspective as producing better science than mainstream evolutionary biology while part of a larger ID Creationism covert religious culture war movement (Forrest, 2007). This was part of the “Wedge” strategy in the promotion of ID in education, public policy, and science (National Center for Science Education, 2008).

Primarily, it was active from the founding in 2005 to about the latest date of 2019 with occasional publishing into 2025, e.g., a single article in 2025 so far; therefore, a functional research space devoted to this research seems unlikely to be supportable (Young, 2021; BIO-Complexity, 2025a; The Sensuous Curmudgeon, 2021). Reporting in 2006 (New Scientist; summarized by NCSE) raised questions about BI’s lab operations and access.

Axe and colleagues published “Stylus: A System for Evolutionary Experimentation Based on a Protein/Proteome Model with Non-Arbitrary Functional Constraints” (2008) in *PLOS ONE*, beginning some research.

Biologic Institute launched the ID Creationism journal *BIO-Complexity* in 2010 (National Center for Science Education, 2010). Since 2010, *BIO-Complexity* has published dozens of papers across 16 annual volumes (2010–2025); publication cadence is modest compared to PCID (BIO-Complexity, 2025a). The Editor-in-Chief was Robert J. Marks II, and the founding editor was Douglas Axe (BIO-Complexity, 2025b).

The rest of the editorial board were William Basener, Günter Bechly, Michael Behe, Walter Bradley, Stuart Burgess, Russell Carlson, William Dembski, Marcos Eberlin, Winston Ewert, Charles Garner, Ann Gauger, Ola Hössjer, Peter Imming, James Keener, David Keller, Matti Leisola, Wolf-Ekkehard Lönnig, Jed Macosko, Tobias Mattei, Scott Minnich, Edward Peltzer, Colin Reeves, Ralph Seelke, Richard Sternberg, Scott Turner, Jiří Vácha, John Walton, and Jonathan Wells (Ibid.).

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They aimed to test the scientific merit of ID Creationism (BIO-Complexity, 2025c). An IRS Form 990-EZ for the 2019 tax year (filed 2020) reflects modest finances (IRS, 2020). Their contact refers to the Center for Science and Culture (Biologic Institute, 2025c). In 2012, BI used a stock laboratory image in promotional material; coverage and DI commentary acknowledged the use of stock footage (Johnston, 2012; Hoppe, 2012; Klinghoffer, 2012).

Most of the funding for the Biologic Institute has been from DI (Biologic Institute, 2025a). The size of the financial contributions via ITS filings, the slow pace of publication, and the niche subject matter suggest that the research operation appears, at best, as a boutique operation that ceased physical operations many years ago. This follows the trends of ISCID, PCID, and numerous leading intellectuals of the ID movement from DI.

There is still more to review for this *A Further Inquiry* series.

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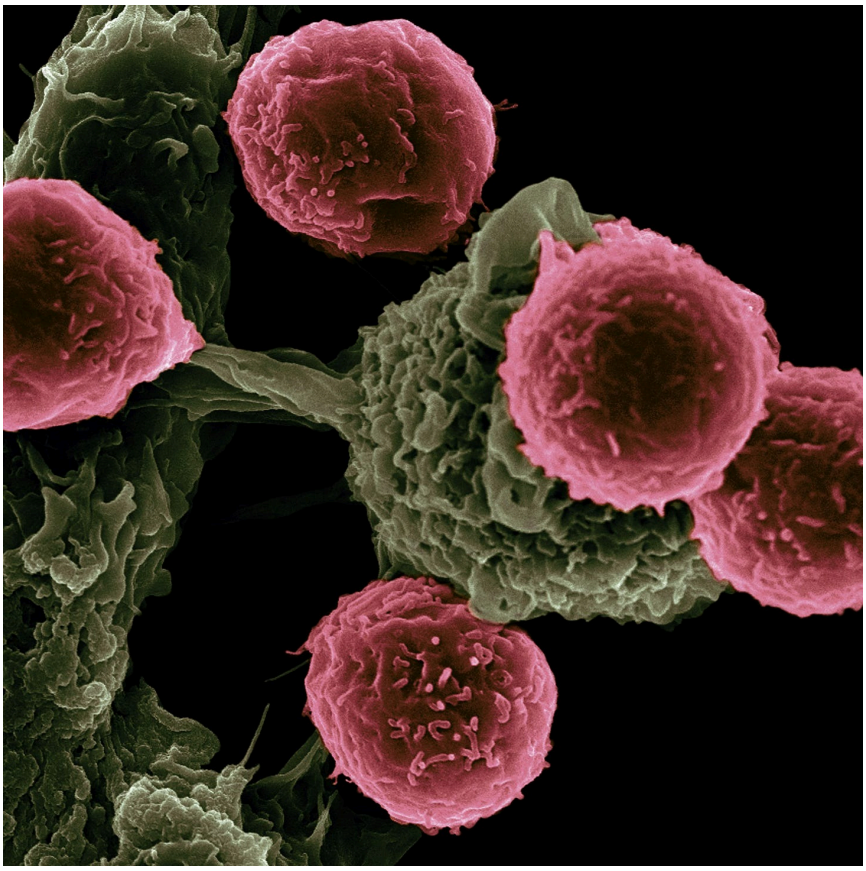
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Why Colorectal Cancer Rates Are Rising in Adults Under 50: Michael Sapienza on Urgent Action and Research

2025/08/25



Michael Sapienza is the CEO of the Colorectal Cancer Alliance, leading national efforts to prevent colorectal cancer, support patients, and accelerate research. Under his leadership, the Alliance has launched groundbreaking initiatives to address the rising threat of colorectal cancer in younger adults. In this interview, Sapienza discusses alarming trends showing colorectal cancer as the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths in women under 50 and the leading cause in men under 50. He details Project Cure CRC, a $100 million research initiative, and LEAD FROM BEHIND, a celebrity-driven awareness campaign. Sapienza also explains how budget cuts are impacting clinical trials and how individuals can help fund lifesaving work.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Why are colorectal cancer rates rising in people under 50?

Michael Sapienza: Incidence is rising at alarming rates in young adults. Colorectal cancer is now the #1 cause of cancer-related deaths among men under 50 and #2 among women under 50. Experts predict it will be the deadliest cancer among 20–49-year-olds by 2030. The reason for the increase is not clear. Despite being one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths, colorectal cancer is less-know and less-funded than other less-deadly cancers.

Jacobsen: What is Project Cure CRC?

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Sapienza: In a critical step forward in the mission to end colorectal cancer, the Alliance launched Project Cure CRC to:

- Fund $100 million in expedited, novel colorectal cancer research, and
- Improve patient outcomes through its dynamic patient navigation and clinical trial portal, **BlueHQ.org**.

It is the largest philanthropic funding effort in colorectal cancer history. To date, hundreds of letters of intent have been submitted to Project Cure CRC, of which 27 have been awarded grants totaling $12 million in funding from the Alliance.

Jacobsen: How does LEAD FROM BEHIND prevent colorectal cancer?

Sapienza: The Colorectal Cancer Alliance launched LEAD FROM BEHIND, a celebrity-driven initiative to raise awareness for colon cancer as *The Preventable Cancer* and to break the stigma surrounding the disease. LEAD FROM BEHIND educates about and encourages screening to prevent the disease. Screening helps prevent colon cancer by removing precancerous polyps.

Jacobsen: What is the goal of End Colon Cancer Coast to Coast?

Sapienza: End Colon Cancer Coast to Coast is a volunteer-driven national initiative to raise support for the Alliance's efforts to end the disease. The goal is to create a movement of fundraising and awareness events from coast to coast to support our mission. We encourage people to visit **colorectalcancer.org/DIY** to learn about the different ways start a fundraiser.

Jacobsen: How have budget cuts affected clinical trials and studies?

Sapienza: Due to the budget cuts, our partners have placed freezes on salaries, personnel and equipment. In some cases, clinical trials have been stopped, putting patient lives at risk. Any disruption to research pauses progress, stalls breakthroughs and jeopardizes real patients waiting for advances in treatment. As the leading nonprofit dedicated to ending colorectal cancer, the Alliance will be tripling down on our efforts to fund as much cutting-edge, high-risk, high-reward research as possible through Project Cure CRC.

Jacobsen: How will Amanda Peterson and Lauren Spero's roles improve fundraising?

Sapienza: Amanda and Lauren bring strong backgrounds and experience in fundraising and volunteer engagement. Amanda will be responsible for growing Alliance fundraising efforts, while Lauren will strengthen volunteer time and talent to maximize fundraising.

Jacobsen: How do marketing and finance work together to support the Alliance's growth?

Sapienza: Marketing and Finance play integral roles in supporting the Alliance's growth. The departments work together to achieve a balance of strategic financial planning and innovative creative initiatives that amplify the Alliance's reach and impact.

Jacobsen: What can individual and institutional donors do?

Sapienza: The easiest way to support the Alliance is to donate at **colorectalcancer.org** or start a fundraiser at **colorectalcancer.org/DIY**. The Alliance invites the public, corporations,

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foundations, and philanthropic individuals to join our mission by contributing to Project Cure CRC at **colorectalcancer.org/cure**.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Michael.

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Sofie Roos on Building Authentic Chemistry and Avoiding Dating Pitfalls

2025/08/26



Sofie Roos is a licensed sexologist and relationship therapist with over 18 years of experience. Based in Stockholm, she specializes in sexual health, intimacy, and couples therapy. She works at Venhälsan and writes for *Passionerad*, offering expert guidance on sex, relationships, STDs, and sex toys to diverse audiences. In this interview with **Scott Douglas Jacobsen**, she discusses why instant attraction is overrated, the psychological traits that make people more appealing, and how authenticity fuels chemistry. Roos explains the value of emotional connection, embracing imperfections, and balancing mystery with honesty. She also highlights common dating app mistakes and shares practical tips for improving real-life and online dating success. Roos writes for Sweden's *Passionerad*: **https://passionerad.se/**.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What one piece of dating advice is completely wrong?

Sofie Roos: That you need to immediately feel attracted to your date, and that if not being so after the first date, then there's no need to meet again.

While the old "Do you believe in love at first sight?" does happen, that's a rarity, because most happy long-term romantic relationships grow over time, and have a starting curve that's quite slow, which for example is why two co-workers or friends suddenly can start dating each other; because romantic feelings easily grow if first knowing the person.

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So, just because you don't feel "This is the love of my life" the second you meet someone for a date, that doesn't mean that you won't be able to fall in love – so give people more chances than just one or two encounters – that can many times lead to happy long-term relationships!

Jacobsen: What are the big psychological factors making someone more attractive?

Roos: The three biggest ones are intelligence, humor and signaling that you're secure in yourself, such as by talking calmly, being able to look someone in the eye, stand for who you are, what you believe in and being able to shot that with respect.

So being able to have deep, entertaining and interesting conversations, but also to laugh your pants off, all while doing it in a way that feels like the "real" you, meaning it comes in an authentic way, will make you way more attractive.

"If you can make them laugh, then you can kiss them!".

Jacobsen: What trick can be used to create authentic chemistry?

Roos: To create an authentic feeling, you must be authentic, this by being in the moment and truly seeing your date, but also by opening up yourself.

This can be done by asking questions, and be brave and go for the bit more personal, deep or edgy ones and not only keep it to "What you're working with?" kind of Q's.

To truly *listen*, and not only hear your date, will also create more authenticity, something you can do by looking them in the eyes while they're talking, nodding your head, or smile when they tell something funny to confirm that you hear them, as well as by asking good follow-ups.

Generally, the more curious you are, and the more you open up, the more you'll get back – this as long as you create an atmosphere where it feels safe to talk deeply. However, this has to be done with fingertip feel, and you don't want to push the conversation so your date becomes uncomfortable.

Also, throwing in some sense of humor with a few fun stories or jokes in between the serious talk creates a more dynamic conversation, which also is great if wanting it to become more authentic!

And, as you already know: try to be yourself, because if not, you're creating an atmosphere which per se isn't authentic, since you're not even true with who you are.

Jacobsen: Why do small imperfections make someone more likable and attractive?

Roos: Because it shows that a person is human and real, which makes someone come off as more genuine and authentic, since we know that no one is perfect!

If you never show any imperfections, it's very easy to get sceptical and think that this "must be too good to be true" – so don't be afraid to show your small shortcomings even early on while dating – that will just make you more likable!

Jacobsen: How important is emotional connection before physical intimacy?

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Roos: For most people, it's key to be able to be intimate in a way that feels comfortable, but also truly enjoyable.

There's a big difference in getting intimate with someone you know, and someone you don't know, with the first being a much deeper experience where you truly can relax and open up in a whole different way.

Therefore, focusing on the emotional bond before thinking about "making the move" physically, should be your prioritization, because if you can make your date feel emotionally safe with you, and that you have an emotional bond, they will want to be close to you physically as well, and that part will happen almost by itself in a way that feels very natural and not forced at all!

Jacobsen: How do you balance being a little mysterious with staying authentic?

Roos: To stay mysterious, you should try to get your date to have questions about you, something that can be done by for example not telling all the spicy details you come into.

To have intense but quite short meetings is also a great way to become more mysterious. Make sure that you have an honest date with great talk, intense emotions between you and with a flirty feeling, but keep it quite short – make your date want to know more about you when you leave!

This can for example be done by not letting them know all about you directly. Keep things for later!

So, to become a bit more mysterious, it's actually mostly about not showing everything right away, but to make your date have some questions about who you are. So integrity goes along well with creating mystery!

However, to be authentic at the same time, you must be yourself and make your date feel that you're not playing any character or game here, but that you're truly honest with who you are, that you're open with your intentions and that you're curious about the other person – so it's a thin line being authentic and mysterious at the same time, especially if the mysteriousness doesn't come so naturally to you, because you don't want to "play it" since that doesn't come off as authentic!

If you feel like this, you come a long way by just saving a little of yourself for later, and by not being so pushy, and instead have a "relaxed" feeling to it all!

Jacobsen: What are common mistakes people make on dating apps?

Roos: The number one mistake is not having an opener that's interesting enough.

There's so many people on dating apps that draw our attention, especially for women, so writing something plain as a "Hey" or "Wyd?", will most times not do it, and once you shoot your shot and don't manage to get their attention, then your chance is often gone.

So, try to be a bit original in your openings, and ideally write something that makes them interested in keep hearing more of whatever you first wrote – whether or not it's a joke, a story or a compliment (such as "You know what's most beautiful with you?").

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Secondly, so many people tend to not give a great picture of who you are – both when it comes to your looks, for example by just using selfies, but also when it comes to not adding in a bit of personal information, no matter if it's your music taste, hobbies, what you're working with or a silly joke you find funny.

Another common mistake is to be too sexually orientated – especially if actually looking for something serious, both with your pictures and your bio (the things you write) in your dating profile, but also when it comes to the conversations.

Even though the culture is quite sexual on many dating apps, it's hard to pull that off, especially in the beginning of a conversation.

So, if you want to meet people for more serious dating purposes, try to be a bit more longterm, and don't think you "must" be sexual just because that's how many people do it online.

And last but not least – do not put too much energy into getting to "know" someone online. If you are interested in someone, instead try to schedule a physical date in some public place quite quickly.

It's only first when you meet up in real life you can get a feeling for if you are vibing or not, and many times, spending so much energy, time and thought on someone based on only texting, then later turns out to just be a big disappointment when finally meeting up.

Jacobsen: If you could give one underrated psychological trick to improve someone's dating life, what it it?

Roos: Think to yourself what you're worth and good enough of this person before starting to flirt with them, something that will create a more mysterious, charming and attractive approach, especially when dating in real life.

If you truly believe you are worthy of this person, you won't become too needy or desperate, but instead be able to keep your integrity and awaken an interest in the other person, since they won't feel as if they're having the "upper hand".

One could say confidence, but not in a douchey way – rather in a romantic, sexy, mysterious, charming and flirty way, where the one you're hitting on can't decide weather or not you think they're the loveliest person you've ever met, or if you just as well could walk out the door and never think of them again.

So when shooting your shot – do it properly, and show your intentions in a way that feels like they don't want to miss this opportunity!

Bottom line – if you truly think you're worth dating someone, they will start thinking that it's worth giving you a chance too!

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Sofie.

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Trauma-Informed Dating Insights with Allison Briggs on Authenticity, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety

2025/08/27



Allison Briggs is a Licensed Professional Counselor and founder of Being Real, PLLC, where she specializes in trauma recovery, emotional resilience, and relational healing. With expertise in developmental trauma, codependency, grief, and caregiver burnout, she helps clients rebuild self-trust, set healthy boundaries, and reconnect with authenticity. Certified in EMDR and trained in Brainspotting, Allison integrates evidence-based therapy with lived experience to support meaningful change. She is a thought leader on trauma-informed practices, women's empowerment, and family dynamics, offering commentary on issues like caregiving, relational trust, and safety initiatives. Her work emphasizes authenticity, empowerment, and compassionate healing.

In this interview with **Scott Douglas Jacobsen**, Briggs shares trauma-informed insights on early dating, authenticity, and emotional safety. She explains how first impressions often stem from survival strategies like fawning, and highlights the importance of noticing when one is performing versus showing up authentically. Briggs identifies common trauma responses on first dates, such as people-pleasing or hyper-vigilance, and offers guidance on when to pursue a second date—choosing curiosity and safety over box-checking. She outlines healthy versus unreasonable boundaries, emphasizes connection over performance, and names overlooked green flags like self-trust, accountability, and respect. Her approach centers authenticity and relational healing.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How can someone balance wanting to make a good first impression with staying authentic?

Allison Briggs: When we're trauma-informed, we understand that "impressing" often stems from survival strategies—like fawning or shapeshifting to be liked. The goal isn't to shut that down, but to notice when you're performing versus showing up from your truth. A good first

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impression doesn't mean being perfect—it means being present and grounded in who you really are.

Jacobsen: From a trauma-informed lens, what are some common emotional patterns on a first date?

Briggs: People with relational trauma may over-function and go into people pleasing instead of staying connected to themselves or suppress their needs to avoid rejection. Others may feel numb, disconnected, or hyper-vigilant—constantly scanning for red flags. These are nervous system responses, not flaws.

Jacobsen: When should folks choose a second date, and not?

Briggs: Go on a second date when you feel safe enough to be real, not just flattered or intrigued. Don't go just because the person checked boxes—go if you felt at ease in your body, emotionally met, or curious in a grounded way. If you felt like you had to perform, explain your needs away, or justify red flags—pause there.

Jacobsen: What signs show the environment feels emotionally safe for authentic connection?

Briggs: You feel like you can exhale. You're not scanning for danger or filtering your personality to avoid being misunderstood. There's space for silence, curiosity without pressure, and mutual respect for each other's pacing and stories.

Jacobsen: What are reasonable boundaries in early dating?

Briggs: Reasonable boundaries include taking things slowly, checking in with your own nervous system, being clear about your availability, and asking for clarity instead of guessing. You're allowed to say no to emotional labor, ambiguity, or intensity that feels unearned.

Jacobsen: What are unreasonable boundaries?

Briggs: Boundaries become unreasonable when they're used to control the other person or avoid vulnerability entirely—like demanding access to someone's phone on date three or insisting on rigid rules that block emotional intimacy. They should protect your well-being, not punish or preemptively shut others out.

Jacobsen: What strategies shift the focus from impressing to building a genuine connection?

Briggs: Before the date, ask yourself: "What part of me wants to be seen here?" Practice co-regulation—being with yourself while being with them. Notice how your body feels in their presence. If you're focused on connection, not performance, you'll start listening more than you're rehearsing.

Jacobsen: What are overlooked "green flags" of healthy relational dynamics early in dating—e.g., radical acts of self-trust?

Briggs: When someone says "I need to think about that" instead of giving a quick answer—that's a green flag. When they pause to check in with themselves, respect your boundaries without pouting, or name their own limits without guilt—that's emotional maturity. The biggest green flag? You feel like yourself when you're with them.

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Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Allison.

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Golden CEO Sam Fankuchen on Transforming Volunteering Through Technology and Education

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Sam Fankuchen is the CEO and Founder of Golden. A visionary entrepreneur and strategic leader based in Los Angeles, California. With over a decade of experience in social impact, technology innovation, and venture growth, he is best known for his work founding and scaling mission-driven ventures. Sam has contributed thought leadership through articles like *Effective Entrepreneurship Demystified* and *How to Be the Next Uber*, providing actionable insights for startups aiming to secure Series B funding and beyond.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What inspired the creation of Golden?

Sam Fankuchen: Golden was born out of a deeply personal moment. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, I believed, for 36 hours, that I had lost my family, only to learn they had taken a standby flight and hadn't informed anyone. That experience left me searching for a way to connect, to contribute, to make sense of things. But every attempt to volunteer, whether through schools, faith communities or online directories, fell short. The opportunities often lacked transparency, relevance or accessibility, and nothing seemed to match the urgency I felt or made it easy to help in a meaningful way. It showed me how disconnected the volunteering process was from how people actually want to, the natural desire many people have to understand the world around them better, and discover where each of us fits into improving the quality of life for others. Golden was born out of that gap, with the idea that volunteering should feel natural, immediate and relevant to your life. It should be something people are drawn to, not out of guilt or obligation, but because it feels like the right extension of who they are.

Jacobsen: Did your background influence its development?

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Fankuchen: Extensively. I was the first person to major in social entrepreneurship as an undergrad at Stanford, back when it wasn't even an official program yet. I launched my first social enterprise as a sophomore and later wrote my master's thesis on volunteer engagement, specifically how to recruit, retain and optimize the lifetime value of volunteers. My time at Stanford shaped my thinking around user-centered design, which gave me the tools to study how service programs work—or don't—and I applied those principles in evaluating over 1,000 volunteer programs across the country. That combination of academic research and on-the-ground learning deeply informed Golden's development. The platform is built around what actually works in the real world and to make service feel like something you want to continue doing.

Jacobsen: How do you address the digital divide for students in under-resourced schools?

Fankuchen: By removing every unnecessary barrier. A student shouldn't need the newest device or fastest internet to participate in their own growth. We designed Golden to be intuitive, flexible and accessible on any device. More importantly, we recognize that not all learning happens in the classroom. Volunteering is education; it's learning through action, reflection and responsibility. Golden makes it easier for students to explore interests, develop skills and build confidence in ways that extend beyond grades or test scores. AI is making education more personalized and dynamic, and we believe service should evolve with that too.

Jacobsen: What are concrete examples showing impacts on student access to college-preparatory volunteer opportunities?

Fankuchen: Service has always had a place in college preparation, whether through formal requirements or personal development. But it's most valuable when students engage with it as a way to better understand themselves and the world around them, not just to meet a milestone.

We believe service is a form of learning that sits alongside academics. It helps students build empathy, curiosity and a sense of agency. That kind of growth tends to show up in college applications, yes, but more importantly, it shapes how students show up once they're on campus. For example, Loyola High School in Los Angeles has its students dedicate the month of January entirely to service. Golden can help students and administrators facilitate and validate those experiences, giving students space to focus on the experience itself, while also helping schools and families trust that the work is meaningful and measurable. For example, we do this across the K-12 system statewide in partnership with the government of Utah.

Jacobsen: How does Golden ensure the authenticity and verify service hours across volunteer organizations?

Fankuchen: Golden's platform is built to make participation real, seamless, verifiable and trusted. We use mobile and on-site validation tools such as geolocation, organizer check-ins and custom telematics to confirm attendance and activity. Organizers can also add optional layers of verification, including background checks and ID scanning. This gives schools, nonprofits and other institutions confidence that reported service hours are not only accurate and compliant, but also personalized and meaningful.

Jacobsen: What role do educators play in integrating Golden into student support systems?

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Fankuchen: Educators are central to making service experiences transformative. Using Golden, they can integrate service directly into curricula, acting as facilitators, mentors and advocates. Many teachers use Golden to set learning intentions before students serve, helping them contextualize their efforts and reflect on the experience afterward. Educators also help students turn those experiences into actionable lessons through journaling, classroom discussions or group projects, which allows service to reinforce academic and social development. Golden's tools also make it easier to scale those efforts, track outcomes and celebrate successes across each school's community.

Jacobsen: How do you ensure protection of student data privacy and ethical use of the technology?

Fankuchen: We build trust by being transparent. Golden is fully compliant with COPPA, CCPA and other privacy standards, and we prioritize data protection at every level. All data is encrypted at rest and in transit, and students maintain full ownership and control over how their data is used. We are transparent about what we collect and what benefits the user gets in sharing specific types of information. Beyond legal compliance, we hold ourselves to a higher ethical standard, ensuring our technology supports students without exploiting their information or behaviors.

Jacobsen: What are trends in how Gen Z students engage with community service?

Fankuchen: Gen Z approaches service differently than previous generations. They want their time to matter, and they want to witness the impact. Golden meets those needs by offering clear, tangible opportunities where change is visible and immediate. While Millennials often respond to compelling mission statements and clearly related programs that deliver measurable results, Gen Z gravitates toward bite-sized experiences with concurrent gratification. They are also more likely to explore service through digital-first platforms and want to connect their efforts to larger global conversations, whether that's climate, mental health or any subject of particular interest to them. Golden's beautifully designed apps and personalized content recommendation technology are well suited to this generation's values, helping them serve with intention while discovering more about themselves and their communities.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Sam.

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Navigating Parent–Adult Child Relationships: From Strain to Growth

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Kamini Wood is an entrepreneur, author, podcaster, and certified parent coach, and founder/CEO of Live Joy Your Way. She helps high achievers overcome imposter syndrome, anxiety, perfectionism, people-pleasing, and trauma using her AuthenticMe™ method. Currently pursuing a master's in Positive Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, she is also board-certified by the American Association of Drugless Practitioners. A survivor of a narcissistic, abusive relationship, Kamini equips clients to recognize toxic traits, set boundaries, and heal. Her bestselling book, Om: Life's Gentle Reminders, offers inspirational reflections. She regularly speaks on navigating parent–adult child transitions with empathy, respect, and healthy, non-punitive strategies.

Parent–adult child relationships often shift as children assert independence and parents struggle to adapt. Strain may arise when parents continue to see their adult children through childhood roles, leading to frustration, resentment, or emotional distance. Healthy boundaries foster respect, autonomy, and trust, while unresolved family dynamics can unconsciously repeat old wounds. Repairing strained bonds requires curiosity, active listening, and mutual accountability, while parents must manage guilt or resentment if children limit contact by practicing self-compassion and reflection. Healing emerges when both sides accept autonomy, respect individuality, communicate openly, and view growth as an opportunity rather than a loss.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What are reasons a once-loving parent-child bond becomes strained?

Kamini Woods: A relationship between parent and child can become strained when there's resistance to acknowledging change, especially when parents struggle to adapt as their children grow into independent adults. Young adults often want autonomy and a sense of agency. When parents continue to view their adult children through an old lens, expecting and wanting them to play the roles they had in childhood, it leads to frustration and potential resentment. Misunderstandings also arise from a lack of clear communication, unclear boundaries, or differing core values, which can lead to resentment.

Jacobsen: How do changing roles and expectations between parents and adult children contribute to emotional distance?

Woods: As children transition into adulthood, their roles shift from dependence to interdependence. Emerging adults naturally are in the process of establishing their identities, defining their independent expectations around career, relationships, values, and lifestyle choices. Parents may feel rejected if these shifts diverge from their own beliefs or expectations, which can also contribute to a sense of distance. Recognizing and accepting this transition as an opportunity for growth rather than a threat is key to maintaining closeness.

Jacobsen: What is the role of healthy boundaries in maintaining positive parent-adult child relationships?

Woods: Healthy boundaries are essential in creating mutual respect, emotional safety, and understanding. Clear boundaries empower young adults to assert their own voice and decision-

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making process without guilt or obligation, building trust and also reducing conflict. They clarify what is ok and what is not, who is responsible for what, expectations, and communication guidelines, all of which ensure both parents and adult children feel valued and respected. Boundaries aren't about creating separation; they are about nurturing closeness through mutual respect for individuality and autonomy.

Jacobsen: How do unresolved family dynamics influence these relationship challenges?

Woods: Unresolved dynamics, like unaddressed emotional wounds, trauma, or communication patterns, continue to replay in parent-adult child relationships. The hidden and unspoken narratives help shape reactions, behaviors, and expectations. This happens most often subconsciously but does have an effect. Young adults who strive for autonomy might encounter difficulty if parents unconsciously project their fears, insecurities, or unresolved experiences onto them. Acknowledging and addressing these dynamics compassionately can create a pathway for healing and to stop the patterns from continuing to repeat.

Jacobsen: How can parents and adult children repair a strained bond in a non-punitive, compassionate way?

Woods: Repair begins by approaching the relationship with curiosity rather than judgment. Both parents and adult children benefit from reflecting on their role in the dynamic and also practicing radical self-responsibility. Compassionate conversations, active listening, and acknowledging each other's perspectives form a foundation for rebuilding trust. Taking small steps toward understanding, expressing appreciation, and admitting to mistakes enables a chance for repair and growth together.

Jacobsen: How can parents manage feelings of guilt or resentment if a child limits contact?

Woods: Parents experiencing limited contact often wrestle with painful emotions like guilt, confusion, or resentment. Self-compassion is vital here, recognizing that setting boundaries as a child is an act of personal growth, not a rejection. Also, taking the opportunity to self-reflect and see how you, as the parent, have been showing up. Is there room for repair? Is there something you may need to adjust or shift? This is an opportunity for parents to engage in reflective practices to understand their feelings and motivations. In addition, understanding the reasons behind the child's need for distance, seeking professional support, and reframing the experience as an invitation for personal growth can transform resentment into understanding.

Jacobsen: What communication practices foster understanding and reduce defensiveness?

Woods: Clear, empathetic, and intentional communication practices build and create mutual understanding. Active listening without interruption, validating feelings without needing to fix or solve, and using "I" statements instead of "you" statements all significantly reduce defensiveness. Setting intentions to understand rather than persuade, taking responsibility for one's emotions, and demonstrating genuine curiosity about each other's experiences build bridges of empathy, compassion, and clarity. Marshall Rosenberg's non-violent communication is a great tool.

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Jacobsen: What shows a parent-adult child relationship is moving to healing and mutual respect?

Woods: A shift toward healing and respect shows when both the parent and the child begin to genuinely acknowledge and accept each other's autonomy, differences, and individuality. It is also apparent that when each party can truly accept self-responsibility and is willing to make necessary repairs with the other when needed. Communication becomes less reactive and more reflective. Conversations move from blame and defensiveness toward curiosity, understanding, and honoring each other's perspectives. Boundaries become normalized and mutually respected. Most importantly, there's a renewed willingness to appreciate the person each has become, celebrating growth as a positive rather than a loss.

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Kyiv War Update: Alex Craiu on Patriot Gaps, Alaska Summit, NATO Aid

2025/08/29



Part 1 of 2

Alex Craiu lives and works in Ukraine as a war correspondent. He studied in the United Kingdom and California, United States, with a degree in documentary and cinematography production. He works as a freelancer and independent journalist. In 2017, he completed an internship with the BBC in London and later started creating videos for social networks, collaborating with various publications. He travelled to most regions of Ukraine, except those fully occupied, and presented online the current situation in Ukraine, including in conflict zones. Currently based in Kyiv, Ukraine, he analyzes and documents people's lives during the war.

Kyiv-based war correspondent Alex Craiu details a harsher six months: surging Shahed drone swarms and intensified missile strikes, including upgraded Russian ballistic systems that reduce Patriot interception rates. Germany, coordinating with the United States and NATO, is rushing additional Patriot batteries to Ukraine. On the front, Russia seized Kamianske in Zaporizhzhia; heavy fighting persists around Siversk and the Pokrovsk sector. Civilians strongly oppose any territorial concessions or a frozen front. An August 10 airstrike in Zaporizhzhia injured at least twelve. The Alaska summit produced no ceasefire, while USAID oversight cuts raise corruption fears. Europe strengthens support as prisoner exchanges continue.

Interview conducted August 16, 2025.

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Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are joined once again by Mr. Alex Craiu. Since our last update, several months ago, several important developments have occurred—including the Alaska summit between President Trump and President Putin.

For today's discussion, our sources will include Reuters, the Associated Press, the United Nations, and Amnesty International, with the possibility of citing Human Rights Watch if relevant. With that, over the past six months, what would you say have been the most significant developments from a central Kyiv perspective?

Alex Craiu: Kyiv's air defences remain under critical strain. There has been a stark surge in Russian Shahed-type drone attacks on the capital. Additionally, missile strikes have intensified. According to recent U.S. Defence Intelligence reports, upgraded Russian ballistic missiles with maneuverable trajectories and decoys have significantly reduced the effectiveness of Ukraine's Patriot air defence systems—Ukraine intercepted only one of seven missiles on June 28, and seven of thirteen on July 9.

Germany has agreed to supply two additional Patriot batteries to Ukraine, under a deal with the U.S.—Berlin will receive upgraded systems first. At the same time, its current stock will be sent to Ukraine within days, with full components arriving in two to three months. That, along with NATO's supreme allied commander efforts to fast-track more Patriot deliveries, indicates progress.

On the front lines, Russian forces captured the village of Kamianske in southeastern Zaporizhzhia Oblast in July 2025. Meanwhile, intensified combat continues in Donetsk: Ukrainian troops have managed to halt a major two-pronged Russian incursion near towns like Dobropillia—delivering a blow to the offensive. Russian forces also pressed into northeastern Donetsk, advancing in areas like Bilohorivka, Hryhorivka, and the Siversk axis, while Ukraine repelled assaults near Siversk as recently as late July.

Around Pokrovsk, the situation remains acute. The offensive there continues, with Russian forces expanding a salient from the southeast and east. Despite intense fighting, Ukrainian defenders regained ground in areas like Kotlyne and Pischane earlier in 2025—but the front remains highly contested.

For civilians, the toll has been devastating. On August 10, 2025, Russian airstrikes in the Zaporizhzhia region injured at least twelve people, targeting residential areas, a bus station, and a clinic. In frontline communities, especially Zaporizhzhia, residents strongly oppose any proposals for territorial concessions or "freezing the front lines," fearing permanent Russian control and widespread human rights abuses.

Diplomatically, the Alaska summit concluded without a ceasefire deal. Putin proposed freezing military advances in certain areas in exchange for Ukraine ceding Donetsk and Luhansk—an option Ukraine rejects. President Zelenskyy has ruled out giving up land that could serve as a launchpad for future aggression. Meanwhile, Zelenskyy is set to meet with President Trump in Washington amid growing diplomatic momentum and European leaders offering strong support for Ukrainian security.

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Moreover, this, in my opinion, is missing from Donald Trump's current stance. So, yes, it does not surprise me that he wants Europe to provide Ukraine with as much support as possible, without relying on the United States. From a business standpoint, that may make sense. However, it should be pointed out to Donald Trump that not everything comes down to business—there are geopolitical and security factors that must also be considered.

Jacobsen: Now, the most significant event recently has been the Alaska summit. Trump said—wait a second, yes. President Trump stated that Ukraine should make a deal. The reasoning, in his words, was because "Russia is a big power, and they are not." Speaking of Ukraine, Putin reportedly demanded more Ukrainian land during the summit. The Russian leader offered to freeze most of the front lines if Kyiv ceded all of Donetsk, the industrial region that has long been one of Moscow's primary targets. That report was cited as part of the discussion from Trump himself. Any thoughts on this offer, this deal, and the Alaska summit altogether?

Craiu: I have the feeling—shared by many here—that there were not high expectations for the Alaska summit anyway, at least not in Ukraine. I have conducted several interviews and vox pops with people on the streets, and to start with, they did not expect much. Primarily because Ukraine was not invited to the summit, they felt unrepresented. It was essentially a conversation between two leaders of countries that do not own Ukraine and cannot legitimately negotiate over Ukrainian territory.

In terms of ceding territory to Russia, I specifically asked people in Kyiv about that, including the prospect of so-called "land swaps." It is important to note that if any such deal were made, it would not involve Ukraine gaining Russian land—it would involve Russia withdrawing troops from already occupied Ukrainian territory in exchange for Ukraine ceding other areas still under its control.

The general sentiment is that Russia does not intend to stop with Donetsk. Its broader goals include taking complete control over Zaporizhzhia Oblast and Kherson Oblast. If the current lines were frozen in Kherson, geographically, it would be more feasible than in Zaporizhzhia. However, in Zaporizhzhia, both logistically and geographically, it is very unclear where a dividing line could even be drawn between Russian-held and Ukrainian-controlled territory.

Jacobsen: In other terms, if a checkpoint or border point were established, would there be a demilitarized area? Moreover, if so, how many people would have to be relocated? How many would lose their homes? What would happen to those who, rightfully, would refuse to leave their houses?

Craiu: From a civilian standpoint, freezing the current lines presents a deeply problematic situation. To implement such a scenario, there would have to be significant movement on the Russian side to establish what they would call a "border" between Ukraine and the territory they claim as Russia. Ukrainians overwhelmingly reject this.

The reasons are straightforward. Beyond legitimizing the aggressor, many people displaced from the easternmost regions of Ukraine still have relatives in near-frontline cities or Russian-occupied areas. What unites them is the hope that Ukraine will push Russian forces back. To leave those territories under Russian control would feel like an act of abandonment. Ukrainians

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do not want to live under Russian rule, and any such concession would be viewed as a betrayal. This is why Ukrainians firmly oppose ceding land to Russia, even though this remains the only scenario Russia sees as a basis for what it calls "peace."

Jacobsen: Understood. Shifting to another topic—USAID cuts have been in the news, raising concerns about increased risks of waste and fraud, as watchdog agencies have warned. These cuts reportedly include the termination of third-party monitoring contracts. What are your thoughts on this development?

Craiu: I am not an expert in this area, but I can offer a perspective. Such cuts do carry serious consequences. They come at a time when Ukraine continues to struggle with the chronic issue of corruption. Independent watchdogs and monitoring institutions have been essential in tracking corruption and building public trust.

The fear now is that without these oversight mechanisms, progress made in countering corruption could be undermined. For example, we have already seen controversial legislative proposals that threatened the independence of key anti-corruption bodies, such as NABU. The absence of external monitoring only heightens concerns that these institutions could weaken further, which would be a major setback both for governance and for continued international support.

So yes, anything that disrupts Ukraine's progress toward reducing corruption ultimately harms the country. That includes situations where watchdogs are not monitoring developments to ensure things are done correctly. Ukraine has a history of corruption, so oversight is essential to keep reforms on track.

Jacobsen: Ukraine has just brought back 84 prisoners of war, including dozens of civilians, in the last few days. At least one of them had been held for more than a decade. What are your thoughts on this?

Craiu: I know exactly what you are referring to. I did not read the specific case of that particular individual. However, Russia has a well-documented tendency to fabricate accusations and charges against people it deems dangerous to its interests. These can include civilians, activists, or journalists.

In this case, the person had likely been detained long ago, perhaps in eastern Ukraine, and then falsely accused. Russia has routinely forced detainees to confess to crimes they did not commit in order to justify their imprisonment. Officially, these are presented as prisons. Unofficially, there is strong evidence that many are detention camps where torture and blackmail are common, with confessions extracted to benefit Russia.

Holding large numbers of civilians and soldiers allows Russia to use them in exchanges, increasing its leverage. It also acts as a deterrent and a means of eliminating individuals who might oppose Russian interests.

When prisoner exchanges occur, they bring both relief and sorrow. Relief, because we see people return—often physically weakened and visibly deteriorated from captivity. However, also sorrow, because many families do not know if their loved ones are included. At exchanges,

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relatives gather in hopes of hearing news. The joy of those who are reunited is mixed with the anguish of those who are still waiting. What remains in between is hope—the hope that more prisoners will one day follow in the footsteps of those returning across the border to their homeland.

Jacobsen: Any thoughts on Germany and its allies providing major military aid packages to Ukraine through the new NATO supply line?

Craiu: Yes. This is part of a broader effort not only to support Ukraine militarily but also to signal diplomatic unity and consistency from Europe. With the United States showing uncertainty in its long-term support, European allies are making it clear that they will continue supplying Ukraine with the defensive systems and equipment it needs to survive and resist Russian advances.

It is important to note that Europe, as a collective, has a massive interest in Ukraine's ability to weaken Russia's military capabilities. There are serious threats to European security. For example, I recently visited the Baltic states, including two important hotspots. One is the Suwałki Corridor, the narrow strip of land between the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad and Belarus, bordering Poland. This corridor is often referred to as NATO's "Achilles heel"—a vulnerable point that could be targeted in the event of conflict.

Another example is the city of Narva in eastern Estonia, which borders Russia's Ivangorod. Over the past months and years of this war, Narva has become a symbolic face-off point between NATO and Russia. On the Estonian side, you see Ukrainian, European, and Estonian flags displayed proudly. On the Russian side, propaganda is projected on big screens and amplified with loudspeakers, targeting the large Russian-speaking population in Narva—over 90 percent of the city's residents, many with Russian heritage. This creates an ideological confrontation as much as a geographical one.

So, Europe has many vulnerabilities. It is in Europe's collective interest to deter Russia and to send a clear message of consistent support for Ukraine, even if the current American administration withdraws or reduces its support. The consistency we see from Germany and other European leaders reflects this understanding: siding with Ukraine in an unpredictable environment created by shifting U.S. policy.

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The Maple Monitor 1: Antisemitism, Trade Wars, and Self-Defense in Canada

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Irina Tsukerman is a human rights and national security attorney based in New York and Connecticut. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in National and Intercultural Studies and Middle East Studies from Fordham University in 2006, followed by a Juris Doctor from Fordham University School of Law in 2009. She operates a boutique national security law practice. She serves as President of Scarab Rising, Inc., a media and security strategic advisory firm. Additionally, she is the Editor-in-Chief of The Washington Outsider, which focuses on foreign policy, geopolitics, security, and human rights. She is actively involved in several professional organizations, including the American Bar Association's Energy, Environment, and Science and Technology Sections, where she serves as Program Vice Chair in the Oil and Gas Committee. She is also a member of the New York City Bar Association. She serves on the Middle East and North Africa Affairs Committee and affiliates with the Foreign and Comparative Law Committee.

Tsukerman spoke with **Scott Douglas Jacobsen** for the first installment of *The Maple Monitor*. The discussion addressed rising antisemitism in Canada, the impact of global conflicts such as the war in Gaza, and the role of social media in fueling hostility. Tsukerman also analyzed U.S. and Canadian trade tensions, noting how tariffs harm small businesses, consumers, and job creation while fostering inequality. Finally, the conversation explored debates over Canada's self-defense laws, contrasting them with U.S. models, and the growing public pressure for reform.

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Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So, first of the series, *The Maple Monitor*, Some politicians have expressed outrage at what they call a 'violent attack on a Jewish woman at an Ottawa grocery store." Prime Minister Mark Carney and Ontario Premier Doug Ford have spoken out against it, calling it a disturbing act of violence against the community.

Canada does have a much lower rate of violent crime than many countries. Unfortunately, however, the rise of antisemitism and antisemitic attacks is not really news anymore. It has been escalating for several years in a row. While Canada overall reports lower violence, there has been a noticeable spike in antisemitic sentiment.

Irina Tsukerman: Including among migrant communities, there has been a rise in antisemitic incidents—not as high as in Australia, the UK, other European countries, or the United States, but it seems to follow the same general trends. Of course, the war in Gaza and Hamas propaganda have contributed to this overall climate. It is not clear whether this specific incident is directly linked to all of that or not.

The fact that attacking Jewish targets has become more socially acceptable—from the perspective of the attackers—is also fueled by social media rhetoric and conspiracy theories. These are not limited to specific political issues or propaganda related to crises abroad; they reflect a broader atmosphere of antagonism.

The big question is: has there been a clear rise in violent incidents? And, beyond that, have there been other types of incidents—nonviolent but still harmful—such as vandalism, threats, and hate rhetoric that are also on the rise in that area? In other words, was this one event an isolated case, or is it part of a growing trend in that particular location?

Jacobsen: This has come up repeatedly in interviews with different experts. It even came up in discussions with the United States Hispanic Business Council. Many small businesses rely on duty exemptions for U.S. shipping. The *de minimis* exemption ends today. So mom-and-pop shops in Canada, too, are going to be hit. Online sellers are also worried.

Shipments under $800 USD. I forget the exact reason that became the magic number, but $800 is the threshold for entering the U.S. without extra fees. Now these shipments will be subject to duties of up to $200, depending on the country of origin. Canadian small businesses selling to American customers will be hit with those extra costs, cutting into profits.

This is part of the ongoing tariff wars. Canada imposed reciprocal tariffs after the United States under Trump implemented steep ones. Some reciprocal tariffs have been lifted, but clearly not all. And trade wars always hurt both sides.

Tsukerman: First of all, they hurt consumers and small businesses, along with customers who face rising costs as companies pass on expenses. Exporters also lose out, as profit margins shrink in competitive markets. The result is fewer jobs on both sides. Reciprocal tariffs and bilateral disputes create anti-competitive environments.

When that happens, customers are left with fewer and more expensive choices. Most of what's left comes from big corporations. That hurts diversity in the marketplace, as small and niche businesses disappear. It also means less competition for the large players, which in turn leads to

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lower product quality—because monopolies can afford to absorb costs, while smaller firms cannot survive.

Tariffs can also be passed down without causing significant economic damage, but often they cannot. What we're seeing is that trade wars don't just hurt the economy overall—they concentrate economic power into fewer hands. They can also lead to microeconomic corruption among businesses. That aspect of these tariff impositions isn't being discussed enough, but it should be.

When businesses shut their doors, what happens to everyone else? What happens to the owners? They're left unemployed. That leads to higher unemployment rates, more people competing for jobs. At the same time, automation is erasing many entry-level jobs. So you have young graduates competing with displaced small business owners for the same types of positions. This doesn't just create stagnation; it creates an entire generation of hopeless workers scrambling for fewer opportunities.

Not because young people cannot compete in an AI-driven environment—they should be able to learn new skills quickly. The problem is there are simply too few job openings until enough people have developed those advanced skills to generate new, complex industries. We're not at that point yet. Right now, the skill base is inadequate to the technology.

And not enough people have acquired the skills needed to develop it further. Tariffs compound the problem: fewer jobs, more competition, harsher economic conditions, lower quality of life, and rising inequality. Instead of improving conditions, tariffs deteriorate them.

And for no real benefit. Protectionist tariffs don't generate significant new job creation. Eliminating small businesses dependent on shipping doesn't suddenly create a thriving domestic manufacturing sector. That sort of shift would take years and would probably be more expensive than importing goods. It's not even clear who would want those jobs if such workplaces eventually opened. They won't open quickly enough to help those losing their livelihoods right now.

Jacobsen: I don't blame the media for devoting 80 percent of their coverage to the economy right now. It makes sense. I'm just trying to find more politically oriented stories, but it's a miserable situation. Nobody is really talking about this angle. In the U.S., there's been growing—though still very limited—coverage of local stories about people losing their jobs and small businesses being squeezed. It is happening, but it's underreported.

All right, we've got one more issue. I think that will fill out our workload for today. Actually, you might be able to expand the project to cover this: Pierre Poilievre, the leader of the Conservative Party and former contender for prime minister, has pushed for amendments to the Criminal Code to expand legal protections for Canadians regarding what qualifies as "reasonable self-defense." What are your thoughts on this?

Tsukerman: In the U.S., self-defense is broadly defined. But in states like New York—especially New York City—it's exceptionally difficult to get a carry license. You can have a rifle to protect your home during a break-in, but if you use deadly force, you still have to prove it was necessary.

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New York doesn't have *stand your ground* laws like Florida does. That means if someone attacks you, you're required to first try to escape or resolve the situation peacefully. Only if it's unavoidable can you use force—and even then, you'll have to justify why it was necessary.

In Canada, I get the sense the debate is precisely over this issue: to what extent do people have the right to "stand their ground" and act immediately in self-defense, versus the obligation to first flee or surrender—like giving up money during a robbery and getting out safely.

It's a balance between avoiding escalation and not emboldening attackers who might otherwise feel free to act with impunity. Even if you call the police, they may not apprehend the offender, who could go on to commit further crimes. But if you physically stop them, you might recover your property, prevent future attacks, and deter others from seeing you as a soft target.

The issue is whether the law should empower people to act in self-defense without excessive legal risk. I don't know if the current government is open to broadening those rights, but there is definitely increasing public pressure as general violence ticks up. Many people see protecting themselves as basic common sense, and they don't want the justice system burdened with minor altercations that could be handled on the spot.

Jacobsen: Thank you so much.

Tsukerman: Thank you.

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Europe’s View of the Alaska Summit, UXO Crisis, and Mine Ban Pause

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Part 2 of 2

Alex Craiu lives and works in Ukraine as a war correspondent. He studied in the United Kingdom and California, United States, with a degree in documentary and cinematography production. He works as a freelancer and independent journalist. In 2017, he completed an internship with the BBC in London and later started creating videos for social networks, collaborating with various publications. He travelled to most regions of Ukraine, except those fully occupied, and presented online the current situation in Ukraine, including in conflict zones. Currently based in Kyiv, Ukraine, he analyzes and documents people’s lives during the war.

Western Europe showed cautious hope that the Alaska summit might yield progress, while Ukrainians dismissed it as theatre given Kyiv’s exclusion and attacks. Coverage emphasized Putin’s U.S. visit more than outcomes. UNMAS warned that unexploded ordnance cripples recovery; from Chuhuiv, mined farmland lies idle. The late-July or early-August UN Security Council session produced little. Amnesty urged Trump to prioritize accountability for war crimes, but rights concerns were not centered. Ukraine’s suspension of the Mine Ban Treaty appears deterrence-driven yet raises humanitarian risks, especially from “petal” mines. Looking ahead, a U.S.–Russia–Ukraine trilateral with Zelenskyy could meaningfully reset talks if Moscow engages.

Interview conducted August 16, 2025.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How do Europeans, more broadly—east and west, excluding Russia, see the Alaska summit? Do they view it as political theatre, a false sense of diplomacy given Ukraine’s exclusion, or do they hold out hope that something positive might come from it despite skepticism?

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Alex Craiu: From what I have observed, the latter view is more common in Western Europe. Skepticism is still strong, especially in Ukraine, but some in Europe hold onto the possibility that dialogue, even under flawed circumstances, might yield results.

The skepticism in Ukraine is rooted in the apparent fact that Ukrainians have a special and direct connection to the outcome—their country is at stake. For Western nations, the prospect of a future war with Russia is serious, but not as personal or immediate as the possibility of losing one's homeland, as it is for Ukrainians.

Western media treated the Alaska summit as a significant event simply because Putin travelled to the United States, which in itself is significant. However, inside Ukraine, it was not seen as decisive. Ukrainians were not focused on the joint statements of Putin and Trump; it was mostly the Ukrainian press covering those details.

In Western Europe, there was some hope that the summit could produce progress. However, in Ukraine, most people anticipated that little would come of it—and they were proven right. For Ukrainians, the only scenario that could change this perception would be the direct involvement of President Zelenskyy in peace talks. Ukrainians see him as the only legitimate representative of their will, conveying the collective wishes of the Ukrainian people.

To sum it up: the further west you go in Europe, the higher the expectations were for the summit. In Ukraine, expectations remained low, and those expectations were, in the end, correct.

Here in Ukraine, closer to the epicentre of this conflict, skepticism is much stronger. The closer you are to the front, the less optimism people tend to have.

Jacobsen: The UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) adviser in Ukraine, Paul Heslop, gave a briefing in New York. He described the impact of unexploded ordnance and the contamination of vast parts of Ukraine. He stated, "Contaminated land is not just dangerous. It is lost hope, recovery, and livelihood." In this sense, the contaminants are unexploded ordnance, not chemical or biological agents. Any thoughts?

Craiu: I would completely agree with that statement. Any unassessed area requires enormous resources to clear. The process of demining draws vast amounts of workforce and funding.

Let me give a concrete example. I recently visited Chuhuiv in Kharkiv Oblast, approximately 50-60 kilometres southeast of Kharkiv. Driving south of the town, I saw large areas marked with warning signs—"Do not pass, mines." These fields once held agricultural value, but they have been unusable since Russian troops left the area one to two years ago. What they left behind are countless mines and unexploded devices.

This is not unique to Ukraine. Across Europe, unexploded ordnance from World War II is still discovered even today, including in the United Kingdom. However, the sheer scale of contamination in Ukraine is staggering, especially in farmland and forests that remain unassessed. Agriculture has long been one of Ukraine's key industries, and now entire fields lie fallow, overgrown with brush, because they cannot be safely cultivated.

The demining process takes an immense amount of time and resources. In some cases, the cost of removing the mines may outweigh the immediate financial benefits of restoring the land for

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farming. Still, the work must continue, because without it, recovery in many regions is impossible.

Jacobsen: That covers mine contamination. Was there any outcome from the late July or early August meeting of the UN Security Council on the crisis in Ukraine, as far as you are aware?

Craiu: As far as I know, nothing significant came out of that Security Council meeting. However, if you are aware of any follow-up discussions among journalists, media, or human rights activists, that would help. I am not familiar with that because there was nothing significant. If there had been, I would likely have been aware of it. So unfortunately, I do not have much to add there.

Jacobsen: Now we are off to Amnesty International. Right before the Alaska summit, Amnesty International called on President Trump to demand accountability and an end to human rights violations. At Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Marie Struthers, Amnesty's Eastern Europe and Central Asia director, said: "We urge President Trump to put human rights at the forefront. He has repeatedly expressed his desire to end the war in Ukraine. This is his real chance to act for victims and survivors. Upholding human rights and ensuring accountability for crimes under international law committed in Ukraine since 2014 is the only way to bring a just and lasting end to the war."

As far as I am aware, that emphasis on human rights was not reflected in the summit itself. Any thoughts?

Craiu: Most of the war crimes that happen away from the front lines are directly linked to Russian attacks. These include strikes on residential areas. Less than a month ago, I visited a building struck by a Shahed drone that hit the upper floors. Such attacks are clear evidence of potential war crimes—violations of the Geneva Conventions.

It is not just the occupied or frontline territories under Russian control. It is also the nature of long-range strikes on civilian infrastructure—far from active combat—that point to deliberate disregard for civilian safety. A logical step would have been to push for an aerial ceasefire. If such a ceasefire were fair and enforced, Ukraine likely would not object. However, we did not see results moving in that direction.

When it comes to accountability, the list of alleged Russian war crimes is long. Prosecutors face immense difficulties investigating, especially in dangerous areas close to the front. However, the evidence is overwhelming, and Amnesty is right to insist this issue remains central. Unfortunately, Trump did not make concrete steps toward addressing it as a priority at the summit.

Jacobsen: Let us check Human Rights Watch for the last piece. Their coverage tends to focus on more minor but important stories—tragic incidents, individual victims. Those matters, but we are aiming for a larger-scale analysis now.

On the other side of the unexploded ordnance question we discussed earlier, Ukraine has formally informed the United Nations that it has suspended its participation in the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. That treaty is the international convention prohibiting anti-personnel landmines. This

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suspension raises humanitarian concerns—it puts civilians at greater risk, undermines humanitarian legal norms, and runs contrary to international law.

One hundred sixty-six countries have ratified the treaty, including Ukraine. What are your thoughts on this? What seems to be the motivation? This was reported on July 18, but it remains important to note, given its nationwide impact during the war.

Craiu: Well, it could be a matter of deterrence. We would need to clarify Ukraine's intentions, but suspending the treaty could be meant as a signal to Russia rather than an immediate operational change.

There are different categories of mines—anti-personnel and anti-tank—and international conventions exist precisely to limit their humanitarian cost. Withdrawing from such agreements is always troubling, because these bans were designed to reduce civilian harm. That said, a suspension during wartime may serve more as a political message than as an immediate declaration that mines will be deployed.

The most concerning type is the so-called "petal" or "butterfly" mines. These are small, hard to spot, and often designed not necessarily to kill but to maim—causing permanent injuries to anyone who steps on them. In areas not yet assessed or cleared, they pose a long-term danger to civilians. That is why watchdogs will need to closely monitor both the legality and morality of how mines are deployed, especially in or near populated areas.

Jacobsen: Before we wrap—any final thoughts on developments since our last interview, given what we have tracked through *Reuters*, the *Associated Press*, UN sources, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch?

Craiu: What will be significant going forward is Russia's response as its military capacity continues to diminish. We have seen indicators that the war effort indeed strains the Russian economy. That could translate into either a stiff pushback militarily or perhaps some new openness toward negotiations.

It will be interesting to see how talks might evolve with President Volodymyr Zelensky's involvement. There is even the possibility of a trilateral meeting—Russia, Ukraine, and the United States—mediated by Donald Trump in the weeks ahead. That could shift the dynamic, depending on whether Moscow is ready for serious discussions.

Craiu: It will be exciting to see how that develops. Above anything, it would be a historic meeting of significant importance. It could be the first step toward paving the way for broader negotiations.

One positive I see is that the American administration appears more invested in mediating and facilitating talks. Ukraine has been pushing for such proposals for a long time, and Russia has repeatedly rejected them. Now, with Donald Trump potentially stepping in as mediator, there may be more flexibility on the Russian side to meet with President Zelensky—even though the Kremlin continues to label him an illegitimate president.

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If such a trilateral meeting happens, it could be hugely significant. The coming months are critical. They could determine either the direction of the war or, in a more optimistic scenario, its conclusion.

Jacobsen: Excellent. You have made my job much easier. Thanks, good luck.

Craiu: Bye.

Jacobsen: Bye.

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Author Biography



Scott Douglas Jacobsen is a Canadian author, interviewer, and publisher, and a board member and executive on numerous boards whose contributions to secularism, humanism, and human-rights discourse are distinguished by their rigour and accessibility. He established In-Sight Publishing in 2014 to produce freely available or low-cost e-books and periodicals under a Creative Commons license, thereby ensuring broad dissemination while safeguarding intellectual property.

As editor-in-chief of *In-Sight: Interviews* (ISSN 2369-6885), launched in 2012, Jacobsen curates and presents meticulously prepared, long-form dialogues with a wide range of interlocutors. These interviews include scientists and philosophers, activists and public intellectuals, addressing themes such as secular ethics, freedom of expression, evidence-based policymaking, and the global defence of human rights. His work appears regularly in peer-recognized outlets, including *The Good Men Project*, *International Policy Digest* (ISSN: 2332–9416), *The Humanist* (Print: ISSN 0018-7399; Online: ISSN 2163-3576), Basic Income Earth Network (UK Registered Charity 1177066), *A Further Inquiry*, Canadian Humanist Publications (CA Registered Charity 118833284 RR 0001), *Uncommon Ground Media* (UK Registration 11836548), The New Enlightenment Project, *News Intervention*, *Canadian Atheist*, Trusted Clothes (CN: 9562184; BN: 791402928RC0001), among dozens of others.

Jacobsen engages globally and interdisciplinarily with issues of social justice, belief plurality, and economic equity. Jacobsen has held the Tobis Fellowship in Research at the University of California, Irvine, on multiple occasions, contributing to empirical and normative studies on ethics and public discourse. He maintains active membership in numerous professional media organizations, fostering adherence to editorial standards and facilitating ongoing intellectual exchange.



His editorial leadership and commitment to open-access formats have generated a substantial, publicly accessible archive—known as the Jacobsen Bank—that documents contemporary secular and humanist thought with over 10,000 . Based in British Columbia, he continues to expand the reach of his platforms, amplifying diverse perspectives and promoting evidence-based dialogue across cultural and disciplinary boundaries.

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