

- Intro: Oh hey, hi, ... yeah you... I know you were just on your phone... Yeah I don't blame you, I've been recently addicted to TikTok as well, in the endless scroll.
- I think I possibly found my new favorite video: the milk video. For some context there's this Starbucks barista and she wants up to this person in the car and randomly gives her all her money. Then after that the person in the car asks for milk. And suddenly milk comes out of nowhere and is poured into the cup. She then like flips the cup upside down and gives it to the person and runs away, and she does this triple spin, spraying milk everywhere before falling on her face. It's hilarious.
- Show THE MILK CLIP
 - Commentary: Just the absurdity, also I feel like she embodies the look I used to give when I worked at Starbucks in high school. Just like... dead but still here whenever I took orders for people.
- Among mindless entertainment and funny videos, TikTok has also provided a way where we can find community, which may be impossible otherwise.
 - For example, Amanda Bennett Ph.D. student at Duke University, has a series of awesome black feminist videos, one of my favorites being the video series on unpacking Toni Morrison.
 - [@defineandempower.co](https://defineandempower.co)
 - <https://defineandempower.com/blog-4/change-is-the-vehicle-freedom-is-the-destination>
- However, despite the positives of TikTok, there are negatives to TikTok as well.
 - One of them concerns to big data and privacy. For example, I downloaded TikTok for the first time a couple weeks ago, and I believe after like 3 scrolls or so I feel like TikTok figured out that I was gay pretty quickly, compared to the 13 years or so it took me to find that about myself. It was creepy for me. Like yikes... It begs the question, how was TikTok able to know about this?
 - Even begs the question, how does TikTok know more about me than I potentially know myself?
 - And if they know this much about me, imagine how much power they can have on me as well.
 - Aside big data and privacy issues, TikTok can potentially be seen as a tool of oppression, as I argue it, because of the algorithm that TikTok, and all social media, utilizes. And in this episode, I believe that existentialism Simone de Beauvoir has some insight on how TikTok can be seen as a tool of oppression and how we can use TikTok ethically.
- In this episode we talk about TikTok--is TikTok a tool of liberation or oppression? How does TikTok necessarily reflect ideals of what Beauvoir calls the "serious world"? Can we use TikTok in an ethical manner? And why do I want to pour milk everywhere...

** JINGLE **

- SEGMENT 1: TikTok and Background
- As everyone probably knows, TikTok is a social media app but it varies from other social media apps greatly.

- In particular, TikTok's main way of interaction is through creating short videos. Usually these clips are 15-second clips but they can be on any topic.
 - Results in people speaking really fast like this to condense information.
 - Bring in example:
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZt_Yu8C0pI
 - [For these short videos, people often overlay music, special effects, and filters, resulting in TikTok's current culture where funny videos, dance videos, challenges, and educational content are shared.](#)
- Because of these videos, TikTok differs from other social media platforms by manifesting what some scholars call "algorithmized self"
 - Some social media platforms operate with a network structure with people you're close with, such as Facebook and Instagram. As a result, you usually get content from your distant uncle or old high school friends.
 - While it is true TikTok still a platform where you're connected to others, these others are not folks that you will typically know. Rather they're strangers. As a result, TikTok needs to operate with an algorithm trying to infer what would appeal to the mass majority rather than curating material from your social media friends.
 - Furthermore, YouTube differs from TikTok because TikTok often has this element of temporality that YouTube lacks. There are often trends that TikTok has and once this trend starts, the clock starts ticking (hehe) before it becomes obsolete and the next thing rolls in.
 - [What are some examples on how to TikTok algorithm runs?](#)
 - *"Your For You feed isn't only shaped by your engagement through the feed itself. When you decide to follow new accounts, for example, that action will help refine your recommendations too, as will exploring hashtags, sounds, effects, and trending topics on the Discover tab."*
 - *"Diversity is essential to maintaining a thriving global community, and it brings the many corners of TikTok closer together. To that end, sometimes you may come across a video in your feed that doesn't appear to be relevant to your expressed interests or have amassed a huge number of likes. This is an important and intentional component of our approach to recommendation: bringing a diversity of videos into your For You feed gives you additional opportunities to stumble upon new content categories,*

discover new creators, and experience new perspectives and ideas as you scroll through your feed."

- This results in highly-personal videos from other creators (i.e., what shows up on your For You page), or create their content. Scholars Bhandari and Bimo in their research [] have argued that when you use TikTok, you're essentially only interacting with yourself. Bhandari and Bimo refer to this as your ``algorithmized self," contrasted with the "networked self" where you engage on other apps through interactions with people.
- "It's a different view of what the 'social' aspect of social media is. Rather than interacting with people you know, it's really this emphasis on personal identity and personas — you're interacting with yourself over and over," Bhandari explains.
- Really, we're trying to scroll through content that we're really engaging with our personal identity and our continual Being: who is it that I want to be reflected through the media that we partake in.
 - Because of this difference in algorithms, scholars have argued that this has manifested as what they call the ``algorithmized self".
- SEGMENT 2: Simone de Beauvoir
 - For 20th century existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, the ideas of "Being" and being an authentic self are very intimate to her.
 - In her book *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she argues that man needs to wrestle with his inherent ambiguous nature (define this) and that man's highest goal is to strive towards freedom, which is closely tied to man's continual project on Being.
 - "to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is able to surpass the given toward an open future." We're not talking about physical obstructions but rather Being and transcending.
 - For Beauvoir, Being is making oneself a lack of being so that they may realize the possibilities they may be free to transcend themselves--a continual movement to being.

- For Beauvoir, one obstacle in freedom is the oppression of oneself. Beauvoir defines oppression as, “This transcendence is condemned to fall uselessly back upon itself because it is cut off from its goals,” which is tied intimately with what she calls the serious world.
- To better understand this idea of the serious world and oppression, let’s consider the example of the childhood.
- During one’s childhood, one’s situation can be characterized by having himself cast into the universe which he has not helped establish, a world fashioned without him. To a child, human inventions, values, customs are predetermined, made, and cannot be transformed. For a child, being is conforming into these man-made ready values. This is the serious as Beauvoir characterizes, man-made ready values or considering values as ready-made predetermined things. Goodness is good predefined by the norms and for the utility of society.
- The child is born into the serious world and plays at being. He believes he is being by becoming the models of being made by the serious world. He falls into a trick to believe in being and is given a sense of security but this is not freedom, it is only a sense of illusion. “He feels himself protected against the risk of existence by the ceiling which human generations have built over his head.” p. 39 The child escape the anguish of freedom. His acts engage nothing, not even himself.
- But how does the child, Being, and oppression relate back to TikTok?
 - TikTok attempts to curate videos that they think will be watched. But these videos are sampled through the success of other people watching it. In some way, these videos are a representation of values that many people prior have accepted or liked to some extent. It takes a gamble in showing you a video because it *thinks* you will like the video because there are some qualities or values that you think you will like. Furthermore, the popularity of these videos often have people reproduce these videos as well through the TikTok challenges. For example, some people attempt to mimic being another person or persona through these challenges. Similar to the child, people using TikTok may “play at being” but in doing so they aren’t being as Beauvoir describes it. Rather, these people may fall into

the illusion that they are being but they are only conforming to values ready made represented by the TikTok algorithms. Oppression, here, may manifest itself through denying one's transcendence by making one think they are being in transcendence but in reality they aren't making themselves a lacking of Being, but falling into a sense of security knowing that they will conform to someone or values already made. But this isn't directly the fault of TikTok but rather inherent in society itself.

- Surprisingly, oppression can hide in plain sight, as it has done here. As Beauvoir remarks, "One of the ruses of oppression is to camouflage itself behind a natural situation since, after all, one can not revolt against nature." p. 89 natural ethics fallacy
- For Beauvoir, the only way we can fight against oppression is through revolt. For Beauvoir, to fight against oppression is the "prove that he is a man and that he is free by revolving against the tyrants." and "the oppressed can fulfill his freedom as a man only in revolt, since the essential characteristic of the situation against which he is rebelling is precisely its prohibiting him from any positive development; it is only in social and political struggle that his transcendence passes beyond to the infinite. P 93 - 94.
- And here we can see TikTok and its algorithm not as a way of oppression but rather a tool of liberation. As I mentioned beforehand, through TikTok we were able to get access to amazing communities that we may not be able to access beforehand. In addition to Amanda Bennet's content, there are also been other educational content, such as science and math explainer posts, as well as other places where one can find their own community. However, this requires the constant revolt that Beauvoir mentions. When using TikTok, it is important to remember that you must revolt against the serious world that the TikTok algorithm can inherently impose upon you but also this "algorithmized self" and "self" conflict that one may struggle with. But this doesn't mean that this is the only thing we need to consider.

- For Beauvoir, to embark upon freedom is also to respect the freedom of others. Although we have a place where we do indeed only interact with ourselves through the “algorimized self,” paradoxically we also engage with others implicitly. Our human input of videos we like let’s others know what values we take into heart and also may determine what videos they also see. Furthermore, we may engage in the freedom of content creators themselves too--letting them know you like their content as well can affirm that what they’re doing is cool but also acknowledges their own pursuit in making TikTok videos and their own projects of Being. For Beauvoir, ethics thus have the necessary condition that we must acknowledge freedom. As she says, “For a freedom wills itself genuinely only by willing itself as an indefinite movement through the freedom of others” But this isn’t a sufficient condition--for we must acknowledge the freedom *of others* to consider something ethical. Thus to use TikTok ethically here is to be considerate of the freedom of others. To meet the conditions of the ethical, freedom must be used properly, acknowledging and respecting the freedom of others and ties that necessarily bind me and myself.
- And so, acknowledging the freedom of others, we *can* use TikTok as tools of liberation. We must be aware of the content we partake in, in the TikTok communities that we engage in, and the potential of the serious values that one is constantly faced with.

Segment 3: Ending!

TikTok is both an amazing and terrible thing. With TikTok we have been able to connect to many communities otherwise impossible without but through it perhaps some fatigue and oppression. But any tools can be seen as ethically neutral. It is through how you use them that we can use ethically and if we take seriously (pun intended) her views on freedom as the ultimate goal, then TikTok can be used as a tool for embarking on our own freedom and for others. It all starts with ourselves, and a conscious effort to use it ethically by realizing our connection with others on TikTok through this new digitalized world.

Outtro:

Special thanks to...

- Ellie Anderson

- Classmates in Existentialism
- And finally you! For listening to this episode...
- Until next time...

** JINGLE **

Omae Wa Mou -- Tiny Little Adiantum Remix

- What is TikTok?
 - Short-form video sharing app that allows users to create 15-second clips on *any* topic
 - Results in peoplespeakingreallyfastlikethistocondenseinformation.
 - Allows users to option to overlay music, special effects, and filters. TikTok has also added a feature to allow people to react to videos and share. Now TikTok has evolved to be a video social media platform where funny videos, dance videos, challenges, and also educational content can be shared.
- How does TikTok work:

<https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/how-tiktoks-algorithm-works-as-explained-by-tiktok/580153/>

 - Stress human input
 - Algorithmic self
 - Projection of the serious world, as said by Simone de Beauvoir
 - “The child’s situation is characterized by his finding himself cast into a universe which he has not helped to establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit. In his eyes, human inventions, words, customs, and values are given facts, as inevitable as the sky and hte trees. This means that the world in which he lives is a serious world, since the characteristic of **the spirit of the seriousness is to consider values as ready-made things**. That does not mean that the child himself is serious.”
 - There’s two ways we can see this on TikTok: the content that you see, where the content you reflects the human input of content that millions of others like, the idea of the algorithmized self.
 - If your a TikTok creator, then you also understand this struggle, perhaps trying to go viral and adapt to the spirit of the seriousness, in a way to understand your audience and what values they like and would agree with.
- Interesting that TikTok knows more about me, then perhaps then I necessarily know myself. A concept of self hood realized that paradoxically others may know who I am before I know even myself.
- TikTok as a tool for liberation for others
 - “Every undertaking unfolds in a human world and affects men.”
 - “...the freedom of other men must be respected and they must be helped to free themselves.” This is “the man who acts in this way, whose end is the liberation of himself and others, who forces himself to respect this end through the means which he uses to attain it... one is then in the presence of a genuinely free man.”

pg 65
- What does Simone de Beauvoir mean by oppression? She says that oppression is
 - “This transcendence is condemned to fall uselessly back upon itself because it is cut off from its goals. That is what defines a situation of oppression.” p. 87
 - She provides only one solution that the oppressed may undertake:

- “To deny the harmony of that mankind from which an attempt is made to exclude him, to prove that he is a man and that he is free by revolving against the tyrants.” p. 89 and as she further says “the oppressed can fulfill his freedom as a man only in revolt, since the essential characteristic of the situation against which he is rebelling is precisely its prohibition him from any positive development; it is only in social and political struggle that his transcendence passes beyond to the infinite. P 93 - 94.
- “One of the ruses of oppression is to camouflage itself behind a natural situation since, after all, one can not revolt against nature.” p. 89 natural ethics fallacy
- “For a freedom wills itself genuinely only by willing itself as an indefinite movement through the freedom of others; as soon as it withdraws into itself, it denies itself on behalf of some object which it prefers to itself. P. 97 “to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is able to surpass the given toward an open future.”
- “Oppression tries to defend itself by its utility.”
- Childhood
 - The child is born into the serious world and plays at being. He believes he is being by becoming the models of being made by the serious world. He falls into a trick to believe in being and is given a sense of security but this is not freedom, it is only a sense of illusion. “He feels himself protected against the risk of existence by the ceiling which human generations have built over his head.” p. 39 The child escape the anguish of freedom. His acts engage nothing, not even himself.
- Slavery
 - Slaves played the world of the serious...? The child’s situation is imposed on him, whereas the woman chooses it or at least consents to it (ok but what about the slaves..?)
 - Reminds me of the movie of Django, where Django I believe is moving toward his own liberation and liberation of others and the other slave in the plantation molds to the values of the white man. Django is a threat to the serious world that the slaves and the fact he lives in being gives other black men the potential of being and freedom for other slaves in the movie as well.
- Man needs to project himself as a lack of being
- Discuss the ethics that result from ambiguity of man
- TikTok also affects your brain chemistry
 - But don’t use this as an argument that there isn’t a choice. If we taken seriously Beauvoir’s argument, then we do have a degree of choice. It’s realizing that TikTok affects our brain chemistry and taking the actions necessary to combat its affects. In Beauvoir’s world, there is free will.
 - [Why you can’t stop watching tiktoks!](#)
 - “It’s a different view of what the ‘social’ aspect of social media is. Rather than interacting with people you know, it’s really this emphasis on

personal identity and personas — you're interacting with yourself over and over,” Bhandari explains.

- highly-personalized videos from other creators (i.e., what shows up on your For You page), or create their own content. When you use TikTok, you're essentially only interacting with yourself. Bhandari and Bimo refer to this as your “algorithmized self.” (This is in contrast to the “networked self,” which is how you engage on other apps through interactions with people.)
- “represent, underline, and intensify real-world social interactions and transform them into digital equivalents.” The purpose of these apps is to provide a platform to interact with others, and users are encouraged to befriend other users. People engage with their networks using tools like comments, likes, and direct messages.
- Interactions on different social media platforms have different ways in which we engage with mankind and thus how we engage in our own personal freedom.
- TikTok, seen as an ethical tool can be seen as neutral in terms of man's tools for projection. It's both a wonderful and terrible tool, as it gives us a means for liberation and oppression for our selves. Hopefully, you can use it as a way for liberation and engaging for the freedom of others... :)

One of the amazing things about TikTok that we are able to connect with communities that we may not necessarily be able without it. Through internet we are able to connect with these communities but we must be wary that TikTok itself represents an algorithmized self self, a self which is a reflection of the serious world and potentially as a tool of oppression and

Algorithms as Oppression: Insight from Simone de Beauvoir

How does Allie Ward open her stuff?

DUN DUN DUN

TikTokology -- the study of tiktok

Chinese cooperation owns. Banned in india, almost banned in US

Evil forces of tik tok, data mining, privacy concerns. We don't have the systems of dealing with these new communications world.

Nothing deals no harm no matter what you do.

TikTok, holding your data, has power over you.
Dopamine boost,

How do you do fellow kids meme

Serious world --

Filter being empathetic to other people (homophily perhaps).

Concerns of oppression, the idea of big data perhaps changes how we should think about oppression and the relationship between TikTok as an entity and an oppressor and other entities of oppression.

Perhaps not the algorithm but the algorithm system that is oppression as it is only us, human input, that determines what is feedback.

Concerns of selfhood and self.

Concerns about authentic self.

Concerns about oppression.

What is reflected through TikTok?

- Mindless distraction

Via functional mri

60% users have problem uses of

Reward centers

Min 36 or so

36:14 tiktok is different from other,

Algorithmize version of yourself

So many chemicals when you go viral...