

Am I turning into my mother?

ZARA ZUBAYER

My mother used to ruin most of my school events by drawing eyeliner under my eyes. In every childhood photo taken on her digital camera, you'd see a little girl with dramatic kohl-stained tear cheeks, wrapped in one of her sarees, which she had tailored to my size. At 20 years of age, I wear my eyeliner dark and bold, something my angsty younger self would probably never have predicted. I obsess over every little detail of my life and get overly emotional over World War II films. More shockingly, I find myself saying, "that's too sweet" on the first bite of a dessert. Eventually, in moments of eerie silence, the realisation comes quite dauntingly that I'm turning into my mother.

The paradox of turning into the very woman you spent your teenage years resisting can be quite an unsettling feeling, one you can't easily make peace with. The epitome of teen angst is the arguments over clothes, slammed doors, and dramatic meltdowns. Much of adolescence becomes a tug-of-war between who we think we are and who our mothers expect us to be. Rebellion becomes instinctive, whether in style, opinions, or emotions. And then, somewhere in your late teens, you suddenly find yourself voluntarily mirroring her habits; getting anxious

over the most trivial matters, consuming bottomless cups of tea as a magical fix to all your problems, and, in my case, inheriting her fear of fast-moving buses on Dhaka's main roads.

As you grow older, the lens through which you saw her slowly begins to shift. The tables turn, and suddenly you feel anxious when she is outside and not picking up your calls. You're the one reminding her to take her medication and watch her health. You begin to understand that you haven't just adopted her habits, you have inherited her nervous system. Many of us carry our mother's anger, the sharpness of her irritation, or her ability to leave a room thunderstruck by rage. Others call their mothers "overbearing", only to realise they've developed the same perfectionistic urge to control every detail. And some of us receive the best

parts: her empathy, her endurance, and her capacity to love.

The complexity of it becomes more visible over time. Her work ethic is revealed through your inability to rest until the task at hand is completed. The way you enter a room and immediately read the emotional temperature might be an echo of her compassion and selflessness. It's not just quirks, but her characteristics that your younger self probably ridiculed at some point. I used to wonder why my mother refused to sit down before everyone had eaten until the first time I cooked for a group of people. Between analysing whose plate needs a refilling and whether there'll be enough for everyone, my appetite became secondary, like hers.

Of course, the transformation isn't comforting for everyone. Many people have rather complicated relationships

with their mothers, which can evoke a sense of discomfort when they see someone with a conventional, healthy dynamic. You're not used to letting your guard down around her, let alone finding similarities that you were adamant to accept. And when you do see the parallels, it's hard to name the emotions that you never learned how to describe or share, only feel. I've seen the women in my life express different forms of maternal warmth, and it's fascinating to see how their own histories shape their instinct to nurture.

There is also the idea of epigenetics, that some emotional responses are shaped by the experiences of the women before us. Our personalities are not entirely shaped by our mothers, but there are certain emotions that often feel like they've lived in us long before we could name them. It becomes a concept of generational pattern,

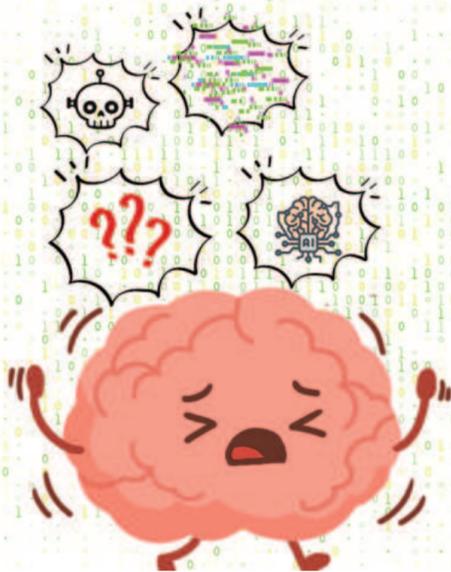
something epigenetics explores for those interested in the science behind our emotional inheritance.

Despite the dynamic we have with our mothers, these suddenly evoked feelings of becoming her make you see her through a lens of identity, not duty. The first person I ever critiqued was her, holding her accountable for her words, choices, and actions. Little by little, through smudged eyeliner and the sarees borrowed from her, my scrutiny turned into understanding. Becoming even a fraction of her made me realise that resemblance doesn't have to be a warning, but it can be its own subtle form of reconciliation.

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How much reliance on AI is too much?



TAASEEN MOHAMMED ISLAM

In 2026, generative AI models aren't just virtual assistants – they are collaborators, coworkers, and drivers of productivity. From content generation to simply helping you make the right choice, there's nothing LLMs can't help you with to ensure you are as efficient as possible. As such, the pressure to become AI literate is also higher than ever, with students, job seekers, and even regular internet users now expected to simultaneously wield the power of different agents, much like Thanos with his Infinity Stones.

I recently came across an ad for an AI transcription tool that made me think we've lost the plot. The transcription tool claimed that popular AI chatbots perform best with detailed instructions, and it was this tool which was the most efficient way to prompt chatbots without lifting a finger. Call me old-fashioned, but whatever happened to typing? Or even voice transcriptions? Why am I being nudged to use AI so that I can use AI better?

There are definitely great uses for AI – be it in business, education, or just making life easier. But when tech giants themselves are helping accelerate the production of AI-generated content, which in itself is starting to encroach into dangerous territory, I start to think that we have a problem.

Rampant AI usage has rendered authenticity invalid; everyone has the same essays, opinions, and syntax on social media like LinkedIn. Similarly, unchecked AI usage in academia is leading to papers with fake citations, half-baked arguments,

and overall unethical conduct – compromising research integrity. The implications of AI go beyond the classroom. People are becoming less creative. Critical thinking, too, is on the decline.

What should be acknowledged is that it isn't only the proliferation of AI that is contributing to these phenomena. But it would not be entirely wrong to claim that it is exacerbating these issues. For instance, a creator I follow incessantly features a popular LLM as a tool that she can't live without. It is something she uses to brain dump and plan content. While it may be great from a scheduling perspective, we may be left to wonder what happened to good old-fashioned creativity. It's not normal to outsource brain functions like decision-making or thinking to someone else, so why is it okay to rely on a bunch of code for the same thing?

I am by no means trying to reduce the decision of whether one should use AI down to a litmus test. I, too, have fallen victim to outsourcing tasks like drafting emails or coming up with ideas to chatbots. But in an economy where entry-level roles are already being replaced by AI, it's important that we don't rely too much on LLMs in order to stay competitive in an already brutal job market. The push for AI usage in everyday work and life is something that we can't escape, but we can try our best not to develop an overdependence on a system, causing unchecked socio-economic and environmental harm.

Taaseen Islam did not use AI to write this article, reach him at taaseen.2001@gmail.com

Looking into the ethos of self-help books

NUZHAT TAHIYA

Walk into any bookshop, and you'll encounter the same promise repeated in different fonts: your life can be optimised, streamlined, or upgraded. All it takes is the right book. Titles like *Atomic Habits*, *Rich Dad Poor Dad*, *Ikigai*, *Steal Like an Artist*, or *Surrounded by Idiots* assure us that fulfilment, wealth, creativity, or clarity are just a framework away.

Life is messy, contradictory, and often unfair. Self-help books offer order, breaking down living into systems, habits, and rules. In a world that feels overwhelming, this reduction can bring a sense of relief. However, in these books, complexity is flattened, structural realities are obscured, and human experience is reduced to tidy formulas. Much of what passes for insight is common sense: get more sleep, move your body, set boundaries, focus on what you can control, and be kinder to yourself.

To stretch these truisms into 300 pages, they are padded with rebranded concepts, anecdotes, and motivational fluff. Habits are not formed in a vacuum; they are shaped by class, disability, trauma, culture, and chance. Yet many self-help texts speak as if everyone starts from the same baseline and has the same margin for error. When success is framed as the inevitable outcome of the "right" mindset or routine, failure becomes a personal moral flaw.

If the system didn't work, you likely followed it incorrectly.

This reflects something broader about our cultural shift. Self-help literature is the perfect product for late capitalism. Feeling anxious? That's a personal failing requiring better habits, not a reasonable response to economic precarity, the climate crisis, or social fragmentation. Can't find purpose? Buy a book about Japanese philosophy; don't question whether your job is meaningless or your community has dissolved. The genre takes problems that might demand collective action or structural change and redirects them inward, toward personal responsibility and self-management.

We live in a fast, individualised, solution-orientated world, where problems are expected to be fixable. Self-help literature mirrors this logic of productivity culture, treating the self as a project to be optimised and measured. You are encouraged to audit your time, your thoughts, your relationships, and your emotions.

This is not to say self-help is useless or malicious by default. Many readers genuinely find comfort, motivation, or a sense of agency in these books. For someone emerging from chaos, a checklist can be a lifeline, offering structure and stability. The problem arises when these tools are mistaken for universal truths, or when personal optimisation is treated as a substitute for social change.

So how might we engage more healthily with self-help literature? First, recognise it for what it is: not an instruction manual for living. Extract

what resonates, discard what doesn't, and don't let any author convince you they've decoded human existence. It also helps to read laterally. Pair self-help with other forms of reading: history, sociology, fiction, philosophy – literature that explores ambiguity, provides context, and sits with difficult questions rather than rushing to answers.

Most importantly, resist the idea that a good life can be fully systematised. Human beings are inconsistent, relational, and embedded in worlds they did not choose. You cannot checklist your way out of grief, audit yourself into authentic relationships, or optimise your path to meaning. These books sell the fantasy that life's complexities can be solved through individual willpower and the right mental models, as if we're all just poorly programmed machines awaiting the correct software update. But sometimes, wisdom lies in sitting with ambiguity, sharing burdens, and accepting that being human is not a productivity problem to be solved.

Perhaps the most honest self-help book would be one that admits life is complicated, change is hard, there are no universal answers, and that's okay. It would be a short book. It probably wouldn't sell.

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