

This essay is a variation of that same philosophical question I have been asking for all of the 2020s:

What happens when humanity mistakes representation for reality?

During this time, I have constantly and consistently argued people mistake symbols for substance. Labels for reality. Politics for identity. Followers for respect. Views for currency. AI for intelligence. Manifestation for effort. Love for codependency. Popularity for legitimacy.

Human beings have confused visibility with value.
And those are not one and the same thing.

I have never once NORMALIZED grown adults that get on a camera connected to the internet and *"react for a living."* I always thought adults that do this and get paid for their efforts was ALL performance for attention and monetary gain. Paid actors, striving comedians, storytellers trying to get noticed and get paid to do this full time. A great many of them actually are. I never once thought the words, *"creator," "influencer,"* and *"content creator"* were ever real words with an inherently deep meaning. It has always been SLOPfluencer and CreatorSLOP to me long before people started using the word SLOP to describe AI content.

AI SLOP is a real thing but what people are missing is the line is very clear with what AI SLOP is but not with people. There is no difference between AI SLOP and Human SLOP. Human SLOP has been around since before the internet was the go-to social space.

I previously had a thing going on in my head that acknowledging a thing and taking accountability for said thing, even if it's just a slice, as maybe there are more than yourself responsible for the thing, eliminates a large chunk of the problem. In most situations, if people just acknowledge the thing and are accountable for the bullshit the thing creates literally makes most of the bullshit surrounding the thing go away.

Somewhere along the way, people stopped asking, *"what value does this person actually create?"* and started asking, *"how many followers do they have?"* Then turn around and treat how many followers they have as literal currency. Those are not the same question.

The internet didn't invent narcissism.

It automated it.

It didn't invent codependent attention whores.

It monetized them.

It didn't invent performance.

It industrialized performance.

Now, everything is performance.

The internet didn't create fraudsters either—it industrialized them as well. The truly creative people are still out there, but they're increasingly forced to compete with Human SLOP whose only product is themselves. **That's the real problem.** We've built an online culture where popularity is too often mistaken for legitimacy, and legitimacy is assumed simply because enough people decided to click "**follow**" or "**like**."

Humans evolved in tribes of maybe 100 people. Recognition had evolutionary value in the early years. Being noticed meant your survivability was higher. Being admired meant more favorable opportunities. Being ignored altogether meant certain death. Social media hijacked that biological operating system and scaled it to eight billion strangers. Our brains never evolved to distinguish between genuine community and algorithmic applause. Now attention feels like survival even when it means absolutely nothing.

The conceptual definition for normal is what the majority is and accepts and everyone else not part of the majority isn't. Normal is a standard by which people accept as something the majority of a group or majority of humanity accepts as everyday occurrences and belief. Everything outside of that is considered "**not**" **NORMAL**.

That is where the concept comes from.

Nowadays its more about accepting something new that the majority rejects and the buzz-phrase, "*this is the new normal*," attempts to project itself as normal when really, it's an invasion of, and rewriting of that normal to adapt all that don't fit inside normal to be normal.

In Layman's terms:

Normal is what everyone else is and you are not, so you change what normal means to now be included and people just phrase that as "**the new normal**." Because humans are hardwired to seek belonging, being outside the statistical majority can feel like exclusion. That is why the concept carries so much weight.

Who or whatever defines what is "**normal**" controls the baseline of what a culture considers acceptable, safe, and expected.

The next logical question is:

Who defines normal on the internet?

Increasingly, nobody does consciously.

The attention algorithm does.

Visibility creates a false perception of normality. If I see something once, it's weird. If I see it twenty times, it's a trend. If I see it every day for six months, my brain begins treating it as part of the environment. And the algorithm gives zero fucks whether that behavior represents 60% of humanity or 0.006% of humanity. It cares whether people **stop scrolling**. Simple. Binary. What we think as complexity in computer science the almighty algorithm sees as a simple concept of binary. On or off. Zero or one. Scrolling or not scrolling.

The algorithm isn't merely computer code.

It's a feedback loop:

Human need for attention to performance to engagement to algorithmic amplification to perceived normality to imitation to more performance to more engagement. And around it goes. That's the Attention Algorithm. The machine didn't create the behavior. **The machine discovered that the behavior was profitable.**

Today, "**the new normal**" is often used *prescriptively*—meaning, "*this is the updated standard you should accept now.*" Calling an emerging change "*the new normal*" attempts to bypass the long, slow process of majority adoption by declaring that the shift has *already happened*. Repeat something enough, make it visible enough, and eventually what was once outside the baseline starts getting treated as though it was always part of it. The algorithm only speeds up that process.

I think gym culture is a perfect example. When this all started, it was fun and funny to make fun of the gym clichés many of us had to bear witness to, both in person and online. Now, some of those clichés have become the culture itself, and it just makes me sick. Gym culture has become a place I no longer want to be, so I built my own really rad home gym. No bullshit. Just music, sweat and iron/rubber/stone. The gym you go to isn't just cluttered with broken equipment anymore. It's now cluttered with broken people. Some trying to fix or work on themselves. The latter, not so much. That could be a seven-thousand-word essay itself on human behavior.

The point I am making, isn't really about gyms, SLOPfluencers, or even social media. Those are just the latest popular places where a much older human problem plays out. Emotional codependency. Aka, needy fucking people. Humans always want/wanted to be seen. The internet didn't invent that—it simply built the biggest stage humanity has ever known and rewarded the dumbest people that have a knack at holding the attention of complete strangers.

Maybe that's the real tragedy.

We spend so much time trying to convince strangers that our lives are the best things since sliced bread that we forget to actually go out live and them. We confuse being watched, hearted and liked with being understood, applause with respect, and visibility with purpose. We believe SLOPfluencer-cash for success. They aren't the same thing.

To me, real growth, has always been quiet. It happens when nobody is filming, nobody is clapping, and nobody is handing out attention and sponsorships. That's why I built a home gym. Not because I hate people, which I do, but because I wanted to remove the performance from the process. Hard ass work doesn't care who you are. Gravity doesn't negotiate. There are no followers, no algorithms, no audience—just an honest conversation between you and your own limitations. One finds out real fast through pain and discomfort what **"is."**

AI becomes the **mirror** we're suddenly horrified by because machines can generate repetitive, derivative, low-effort garbage at industrial scale. Meanwhile us humans are all like; "*hey! That's our job!*" That's the joke. On top of all of that there is an even darker philosophical observation underneath it: perhaps AI didn't degrade internet culture nearly as much as **AI learned internet culture from us**. The machine encountered an ecosystem already filled with reaction videos, rage bait, fake experts, recycled opinions, thirst traps, manufactured lifestyles, motivational clichés and people selling their personalities as products. Then we act

shocked when the machine reproduces the pattern. Maybe that's why so much of internet culture feels hollow, fake and full of bullshit performance art. We've become obsessed with documenting a journey we're not even taking. **And maybe accountability is the one thing the Attention Algorithm cannot manufacture.** Performance is public. Accountability is personal. Attention can be purchased. Followers can be purchased and accumulated. Engagement can be manipulated. Forgiveness cannot legitimately be demanded from an audience.

People want forgiveness for all? I say only if people are willing to acknowledge, are accountable, do the work and actually ask for forgiveness. Forgiveness isn't for all if one chooses NOT to ask for it, or do the work to earn it. It's not an entitlement. Its earned. It is harder to break trust and get it back over never breaking it to begin with. We all see a pink elephant walking around. The ones that ignore it will have the hardest place to be in their hearts.

Alone...

The Attention Algorithm
by David-Angelo Mineo
8/9/2026
1,551 Words