

Sextortion
Has Entered
the Family
Group Chat

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Julie Jargon

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Chris Cline was sitting by a hotel pool with his wife last month before attending an American Farm Bureau Federation conference in New Orleans when he got a text from an unknown number. Someone with a California area code had created a group chat that included his wife, Jeanne, son-in-law, Jordan Parmley, and Jordan’s parents. “All the Cline family and the Parmley family I have something to show y’all,” the sender wrote. “Let me add more family.”

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There’s a Legal
Fight Brewing
at Oktoberfest

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Patience Haggin

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

MUNICH—Beer isn’t just a drink here. It’s tradition and identity. And, for some, grounds for an antitrust war. For generations, the same beer makers have poured every drop at Oktoberfest. Organizers say it’s all about maintaining the purity of the Bavarian bacchanal. Critics call it a straight-up cartel. A showdown is brewing over exactly who can sell suds, run tents and otherwise participate in the party. “It’s the hardest battle you can fight in Munich,” said Steffen Marx, who has dreamed of selling his Giesinger Bräu at Oktoberfest since founding the brewery in a garage in 2006.

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The Liberty Community Gardens in lower Manhattan with One World Trade Center in the background.

CLARK HODGEN FOR WSJ

25 Years After the Sept. 11 Attacks,
Lower Manhattan Is Thriving

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Peter Grant

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

In 2001, lower Manhattan was shattered. The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks killed close to 3,000 people and reduced

the World Trade Center to rubble. The Twin Towers’ shocking collapse inflicted such trauma that many wondered if the Financial District could ever recover. Now, as the 25th anniversary of the event approaches, lower Manhattan

is roaring back. Its population has roughly tripled over the past 2½ decades, and more than 230,000 people work there—nearly as many as before the attacks. Few urban projects can compare with the new World Trade Center in scale

or ambition. More than \$20 billion in public and private money was spent creating about 10 million square feet of office space, nearly half a million square feet of retail, a transportation hub, the 9/11 Memorial and Museum and a performing arts center.

When American Express broke ground in July on a new 55-story headquarters, it started the last major development at the 16-acre site, a milestone after years of disputes and delays over the rebuilding effort.

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PANOS KOUGIAS/TO BHMA INTL EDITION

Giannis Efthimiou poses in front of his own artwork for TO BHMA International Edition.

TO BHMA International edition

Giannis Efthimiou: ‘I’m interested
in what I can’t control in painting’

By Panos Kougias

Giannis Efthimiou has a slight problem with certainties. Even when you ask him if he has found his painting idiom—which, looking at his work, one could easily assume he has—he avoids a simple yes. “It’s not something I actively seek; it emerges,” he says. The

phrase is interesting precisely because Efthimiou is an artist whose work has acquired several highly recognizable characteristics in recent years—paper pulp; intensely textured surface; mountains and seas; houses, horses and riders—that recur from work to work. But in his studio, you don’t get the impression that he has found a formula which he intends simply to

repeat from here on out. After all, paper pulp, the material with which his painting is now most closely associated, does not easily lend itself to certainties. It bulges, breaking the flat surface, and it diverts the image from its probable initial path; worst-case scenario, it can also tear when it’s being detached, ruining weeks of work.

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25 Years After the Sept. 11 Attacks, Lower Manhattan Is Thriving

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Its population has tripled while media and tech firms have moved in, making the Financial District the envy of other U.S. downtowns

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Yet new office buildings and infrastructure alone don't explain downtown's resurgence. Developers converted dozens of obsolete office buildings into apartments, helping create a neighborhood where tens of thousands of people live within walking distance of their jobs.

Even though the city stepped up scrutiny of conversions this summer after a near partial collapse at a Midtown building, lower Manhattan has 23 such projects either planned or under construction, according to the Alliance for Downtown New York.

The neighborhood once emptied when office workers caught the commute home. Today, it boasts a vibrant mix of restaurants, rooftop bars and concert venues on the nearby waterfront. Stone Street, a narrow cobblestone lane dating back hundreds of years to when Manhattan was under Dutch control, bustled on a recent Friday evening. Young people ate and drank at crowded communal tables.

"It's the Financial District, but it's fun down here," said Brittany Belfiore, a bartender at Harry's Side Bar on Stone Street.

Cities across the coun-



A jazz group performed last month at One Flight Up, a new club that opened this summer just a few blocks from the World Trade Center.

try have struggled to replicate such success. Dallas, Denver, Portland, Ore., Providence, R.I., Chicago

and Washington, D.C., have all pursued office conversions as a means for revitalizing downtrodden busi-

ness districts. But the efforts have done little to give their respective downtowns the round-the-clock feel found

in lower Manhattan.

The neighborhood has had some unusual advantages, from New York

City's strong housing demand to an abundance of prewar buildings with smaller floors well suited to conversions. After 9/11, the federal government offered developers new incentives to turn downtown offices into housing.

But the area long defined by Wall Street is now far more diversified. Financial-services and real-estate firms, which accounted for about two-thirds of downtown employment a quarter-century ago, now account for roughly a third, according to the Alliance for Downtown New York.

"It's a new world down there," said Lisa Silverstein, chief executive of World Trade Center developer Silverstein Properties, and daughter of its founder Larry Silverstein.

Few could have imagined such a turnaround after the wreckage of Sept. 11. The attacks destroyed or damaged some 30 million square feet of commercial space, including the entire seven-building World Trade Center complex and nearby office towers.

The PATH commuter rail terminal beneath the Trade Center was gone, subway service was disrupted and power and communications networks were crippled. Tens of thousands of workers were displaced,

leaving businesses scattered across the city and beyond.

Even as New Yorkers struggled to comprehend the sheer scale of the attack, a consensus quickly emerged that rebuilding the World Trade Center was essential to the city and country's recovery.

That was about all that was agreed upon. Battles erupted over nearly every aspect of the rebuilding, including how much of the site should become a memorial and whether housing should be included.

Yet the enormity of what had happened gave the rebuilding a sense of purpose that transcended the usual politics. Public officials, business leaders and civic groups understood they were doing something "so much larger than just deciding what to put on 16 acres," said Tom Wright, chief executive of the Regional Plan Association.

The rebuilding also benefited from something few other struggling downtowns could count on. Billions of dollars flowed into lower Manhattan from federal aid, insurance proceeds and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

Businesses slowly began returning. In 2006, Silverstein Properties completed 7 World Trade Center, the first office tower rebuilt after the attacks. The government gave relocating businesses tax benefits and other incentives, but filling the building also meant overcoming a fear that lingered long after the attacks.

For years, "we couldn't get anybody to come downtown to look at anything," said Mary Ann Tighe, the CBRE broker who represents Silverstein. "People were literally afraid."



It is not uncommon to see residents with their pets around the district, including Petra Serarens, who walked Rosie near the New York Stock Exchange.

Early in the rebuilding effort, a federally funded program offered grants of as much as \$14,500 to households that stayed in or moved to lower Manhattan. By early 2026, downtown had more than 37,000 apartments, nearly triple the 13,000 that existed in 2000.

Developers Richard Born and Peter Levenson led a group that converted 90 West Street into apartments with help from government financing and tax incentives, a project that would have seemed almost unimaginable before Sept. 11. The landmark office building across from the site of the terrorist attacks was in shambles after steel from the collapsing South

Tower tore into it. Fires gutted much of the interior.

The developers restored the building and turned it into about 410 apartments, though they worried that years of construction at the World Trade Center would scare away renters. Instead, some of the apartments most in demand were those facing the construction site.

"People liked to look out their window and watch," Born said.

The new World Trade Center increasingly attracted technology, media and advertising companies rather than the financial firms that had long dominated downtown.

Price was one of the attractions. Government

incentives helped reduce occupancy costs, and at times during the rebuilding companies could lease downtown office space for about 30% less than comparable space in Midtown. Billions of dollars of investment vastly improved lower Manhattan's transportation network.

Spotify, the music-streaming company, chose Four World Trade Center as it was preparing to become a publicly traded company, signing its lease in 2017.

"We've decided to go public in New York on the New York Stock Exchange," said Dustee Jenkins, Spotify's chief public affairs officer. "And then we took offices just around the corner."

It also forged ties with the Perelman Performing Arts Center that is part of the complex, using it for podcast recordings, talks and a new music series showcasing emerging artists and podcasters.

A downtown worker is now more likely to draw a paycheck from a media, technology or advertising company—such as *Conde Nast*, Spotify, Uber or WPP Media—than from a big bank.

Downtown has a budding live-music scene that barely existed a generation ago. In 2018, Pier 17 opened a 3,400-capacity rooftop venue that brings top acts to the waterfront.

On a recent evening, more than 2,000 fans packed around the stage as heavy-metal band Acid Bath played through clouds of fog. At the merchandise table, Ross Banan, a 40-year-old New York resident, said the evening had changed his impression of downtown. He especially liked the rooftop setting, with the skyscrapers of the Financial District towering over the crowd.

"I definitely will be coming back," he said.

Tourism has become another pillar of downtown's economy. Lower Manhattan had just six hotels on Sept. 11; today it has 42, as the World Trade Center, memorial and other attractions have turned the neighborhood into a destination for visitors.

American Express, whose roots in lower Manhattan stretch back nearly two centuries, chose the World Trade Center for its new global headquarters.

"When many questioned what the future would hold, American Ex-

press chose to stay," said Denise Pickett, who oversees the company's global real estate operations, at the groundbreaking ceremony.

Lower Manhattan's recovery remains incomplete. Downtown's office-vacancy rate was at 22% in July, compared with about 18% in Midtown, according to Cushman & Wakefield. The former Deutsche Bank site across from the World Trade Center remains undeveloped despite plans to build about 1,200 apartments there.

But many of the emotional scars have healed. And there is a generation now with little or no memory of Sept. 11. Eric Diaz, 24, a designer at SHoP Architects, moved to the Financial District in part so he could walk to the firm's offices in the Woolworth Building, and says he enjoys having restaurants, bars and other services close to home.

The rebuilt World Trade Center has become part of that neighborhood in a way the old complex never was. Streets that had been eliminated to create the original superblock were restored, allowing people to walk through the site, with the 9/11 Memorial woven into the surrounding neighborhood.

Diaz says his mother was pregnant with him on Sept. 11 and watched the attack from the Midtown office where she worked. He said he found the memorial moving the first time he visited it.

But the World Trade Center today is now a part of his daily life. He sometimes walks through the site on his way to work. "It's probably the quickest route," he said. "It's just a nice area to be."

Sextortion Has Entered the Family Group Chat

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Added to a text thread from an unknown number, these family members were surprised with pornography featuring a relative

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The sender then added Chris's 16-year-old son. "About to start guys," the mystery sender wrote.

Chris typed, "Who is this?"

"Block the number Chris," Jordan wrote in the group chat.

Before Chris could block it, the sender attached a photo plucked from the public Facebook account of his 24-year-old daughter, Allyson. It was a picture of Allyson and

Jordan riding in a golf cart. Next, the sender posted a photo of what appeared to be Allyson engaging in a sexual act.

The family members blocked the number, but there was confusion about what was happening. Chris, who handles public relations for the Missouri Farm Bureau, and counts an identity-theft monitoring and prevention firm among his clients, gathered that the texts were leading to a demand for money to prevent the further release of osten-

sibly AI-generated images.

Allyson and Jordan were watching a TV show in their home in Park Hills, Mo., when the messages came through.

Jordan says he was immediately suspicious. Then he saw the image. "We don't take photos like that because we know how insecure phones can be, and we're not like that anyway," says Jordan, who works remotely for a power company.

"My heart dropped in my stomach," says Allyson, a medical receptionist. "I felt

like my identity had been ripped from me."

Months earlier, Chris had helped his identity-theft client pitch stories about sextortion, which involves using the threat of sharing pornographic images—real or fake—to extract money from victims. Teenage boys have lately been a key target of sextortion schemes. Now, he was living it.

Scammers are finding new targets, and AI is making it easier.

"This is all automated,"



Allyson Parmley was the target in a sextortion scheme.

says Michael Scheumack, chief innovation and marketing officer at IdentityIQ, the firm Chris represents. "It's not someone sitting there researching people, they're using AI to scrape social-media accounts and publicly available images."

Allyson felt deeply embarrassed that her family, including her husband's parents, saw the convincing-looking image.

"My in-laws called us immediately and asked what this was," Allyson says. "We walked them through how to get rid of the photo and how to mark the message as spam and report it."

The family wondered whether a wedding e-vite Jordan had responded to that day could have been connected. Scams in which criminals send fake electronic invitations to steal email credentials are a growing problem. But Allyson says

she and Jordan confirmed that the invitation was issued by their friends, and wasn't a spoof.

An AI model and a computer Cybersecurity experts say what happened to this fam-

ily could happen to anyone.

One of the family members or someone they all know might have had a

What you can do

Unless you are a high-value target with millions in bitcoin or a huge public following, you might not consider yourself a target. That doesn't mean we shouldn't all follow these simple steps to protect ourselves:

Set your accounts to private. It is hard to eliminate every photo of you on the internet, but don't make it easy for criminals to get photos from your social-media accounts. Make your Facebook and Instagram accounts private and only accept follow requests from people you know. After the group-chat situation, that is what Allyson did.

Manage your passwords and authentication. Use strong, unique passwords for every email, financial and social-media account. Go to the security settings and turn on two-factor authentication for all services, too. If you're the victim of a sex-

ortion scam or other type of cyber fraud, change your passwords immediately.

Disconnect from online sessions. Scheumack recommends going into the security settings of your email and social-media accounts, checking which devices are signed in and ending any suspicious or unknown sessions. If criminals are logged in, they can continue accessing an account for a while after you change its password.

Don't pay. If you receive demands for money in a sextortion scenario, cybersecurity experts advise not paying. Instead, block the scammer and report the phone number or social-media username to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center. "If you don't pay, will they send the photo? Possibly," Grobman says. "If you do pay, will it guarantee they won't? Not necessarily."

compromised email account that was used to obtain their phone numbers. The scammer could also have used information publicly available on the internet.

In either scenario, AI was likely employed to gather and analyze information on the family members and how they are related, says Steve Grobman, chief technology officer at cybersecurity software company McAfee.

"If you take over someone's email account that has contacts, you have all the information you need," Grobman says, "emails, phone numbers and hints from messages of how people are related."

In the past, scammers would have manually combed through social-media profiles and other online data to piece together details about potential targets and obtain contact information. Now, someone with a powerful computer and an

open-weight AI model—a publicly released AI model that is free to download and run—can execute large-scale scams.

"Bad actors are not using the AI services consumers use, like Gemini, ChatGPT or Claude, which would have the ability to observe what they're doing and stop them," Grobman says. "They're most likely using models that are running on dedicated machines."

Similarly, creating fake pornographic images of people could be as simple as using one of numerous clothes-removal programs on the internet, he says. However it happened, being the subject of AI-generated nudes has repercussions that go beyond the initial embarrassment.

"I'm not sure where that image went," Allyson says. "My fear is that this could resurface and blow up more than it already has."

A Good Diet Is Not Hidden in the Grams

Two recent dietary studies appear to challenge what we previously knew about protein intake and the fat-rich ketogenic diet

By Ioanna Soufleri

Those of us trying to keep up with the latest scientific findings on nutrition have probably been confused lately: first, at the end of July, a major review study called into question the primacy of protein for healthy aging, while last week another study concluded that the high-fat, extremely low-carbohydrate ketogenic diet is superior to the Mediterranean diet and the low-fat diet when it comes to protecting the liver.

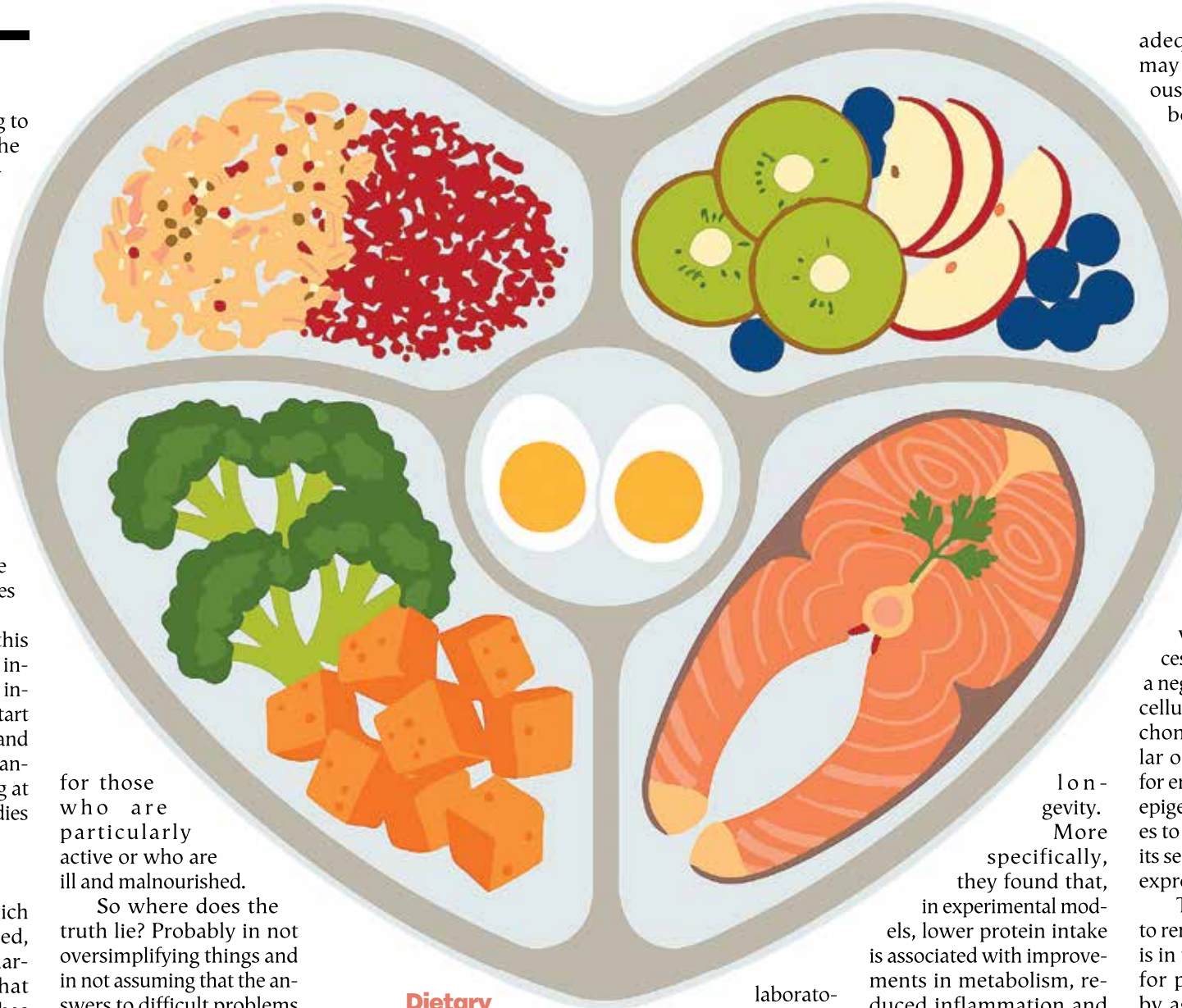
But what does all this mean? And how can we incorporate these findings into our lives? Before we start cutting back on protein and eating bacon in large quantities, it is worth looking at the findings of these studies with a critical eye.

The full protein

We live in an age in which protein is being glorified, and with the help of marketing, the message that “the more, the better” has reached everyone. This has, of course, created a huge market: protein bars, rich yogurts and cereals, special drinks and other foods are being purchased in large quantities with the aim of increasing daily protein intake.

According to the findings of a major study that evaluated more than 350 scientific papers, however, chronically excessive protein intake may not be as beneficial for longevity as it is often portrayed to be. In some cases, in fact, lower protein intake appears to be associated with metabolic changes linked to healthier aging.

At first glance, this finding appears to contradict the prevailing view that older people may need more protein than is recommended for a younger adult. This is because, as we age, we gradually lose muscle mass and strength. This process, known as sarcopenia, can reduce our mobility and increase the risk of falls. Thus, dietary recommendations worldwide suggest approximately 1.0-1.2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day for healthy older adults, and even higher amounts



for those who are particularly active or who are ill and malnourished.

So where does the truth lie? Probably in not oversimplifying things and in not assuming that the answers to difficult problems involving living organisms can be given through universally applicable numbers of grams of dietary components.

The complexity of being alive

The recent review study was based on decades of findings showing that restricting total calorie intake increases survival in organisms studied in the

Dietary recommendations worldwide suggest approximately 1.0-1.2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day for healthy older adults, and even higher amounts for those who are particularly active or who are ill and malnourished

laboratory. The researchers wanted to examine the issue in greater detail and investigate how restricting protein intake affects survival. Thus, through their review of hundreds of studies on the subject, they found that protein, which indeed helps maintain muscle, can, under certain conditions, activate biological pathways that are not necessarily favorable to

longevity. More specifically, they found that, in experimental models, lower protein intake is associated with improvements in metabolism, reduced inflammation and less cellular damage. Clearly, this study, which was published in the scientific journal Cell Press Blue, overturns the oversimplified idea that more protein means better health. But under no circumstances does it constitute a recommendation for older people to follow a low-protein diet!

For a person who is already struggling to maintain muscle mass, in-

adequate protein intake may be far more dangerous than any theoretical benefit that could result from restricting it. Conversely, for a relatively young adult who leads a sedentary lifestyle and already consumes large amounts of protein, adding even more protein may have harmful long-term consequences for their health and longevity.

It is worth noting that the scientists identified precisely the areas in which long-term excessive protein intake has a negative effect, including cellular senescence, mitochondrial function (cellular organelles responsible for energy production), and epigenetic changes (changes to DNA that do not alter its sequence but affect gene expression).

These findings force us to remember that “the devil is in the details.” The need for protein is influenced by age, physical activity, overall diet, health status and muscle mass. And this is something that today’s obsession with a universal daily protein-intake target often overlooks. Just as it overlooks the very important factor of where the protein comes from.

Previous studies in humans have shown that the relationship between protein and healthy aging may depend on the type of protein and our overall diet. A dietary pattern based on fish, legumes, dairy products, eggs, nuts, vegetables and whole grains is consistently shown to be preferable for healthy aging. And it is very different from a diet that seeks to maximize protein through processed products.

In other words, the amount of protein may be one of the factors we need to take into account if we are aiming for healthy aging, but at the same time we must ask ourselves which foods it comes from, what it replaces in our diet, and what our needs are at each stage of our lives.

And, of course, we must remember that a food does not automatically become healthy simply because it contains more protein.

What Does a ‘Better’ Diet Mean?

As broad as the study on the relationship between protein intake and healthy aging was, the study comparing the ketogenic, Mediterranean and low-fat diets was just as small. Only 42 of the participants completed the study, which involved people with obesity, prediabetes and elevated liver fat — that is, a group considered to face increased metabolic risk.

According to the relevant article, which was published in the scientific journal Cell Metabolism, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the three diets, and the scientists made sure that, by regulating calorie intake, everyone lost approximately 10% of their initial body weight over the five months that the study lasted.

And, as was rather expected, in all three cases the weight loss led to an improvement in the participants’ metabolic profiles. There was, however, also an unexpected finding: the ketogenic diet led to a reduction of approximately 67% in intrahepatic fat, compared with approximately 45% in the Mediterranean and low-fat diet groups.

This finding, which received widespread publicity with headlines along the lines of “the ketogenic diet beats the Mediterranean diet,” sparked a major discussion among leading nutritionists on social media. They felt the need to clarify that the study was not a “beauty contest among diets” and to emphasize that

it concerned a very specific group within the population.

They also stressed that the benefits of the ketogenic diet for this particular group need to be confirmed in broader studies, as they could perhaps be used for personalized interventions in specific patients.

As for the rest of us, experts continue to recommend the Mediterranean diet, which is based on a wide variety of foods and can be incorporated relatively easily into everyday life.

Because the best diet is not the one that produces impressive results within the framework of a controlled clinical trial, but the one that is effective, safe and, above all, one that a person can consistently follow for years.



Video Game Against Depression

Through storyline games, teens are discovering how addiction and their actions can affect real-life situations

By Foteini Fragkou

For years, video games have been viewed with caution and, certainly, for many parents they are not the obvious solution to the potentially deteriorating mental health of their teenage children. However, it appears that some video games contribute both to the prevention and treatment of serious conditions, such as adolescent depression. This emerged from a recent clinical study by researchers at the American university Dartmouth, whose findings were published in JAMA Network Open.

A game that ‘teaches’ better decisions

The game in question is PlaySmart, a video game developed by the play2PREVENT laboratory at the Dartmouth medical school specifically to support the mental health of adolescents. Players take on the role of the main character and are asked to manage situations inspired by the real-life experiences of young people, making decisions concerning mental health, relationships and substance use.

Through these choices, they learn to recognize the signs of depression, assess different ways of responding, and seek help from trusted adults. The consequences of their decisions shape the de-

velopment of the story, while also allowing them to assess what might have happened if they had made different choices.

To determine the extent to which the game contributes to preventing and reduc-

ing symptoms of depression, the researchers conducted one of the largest clinical trials of its kind, involving 532 students between the ages of 16 and 19. The teenagers who participated in the study met specific criteria, as they had

either reported recent use of alcohol, cannabis, e-cigarettes or other non-opioid substances, or had disclosed that they were experiencing symptoms of depression.

The children were divided into two groups: 269

teenagers played PlaySmart, while the remaining 263 played commercial video games. For up to six weeks, the students played for approximately one hour a week after school, while the researchers monitored each

student’s mental health over the course of one year.

The benefits lasted for a year

The results were particularly encouraging. After completing the intervention, the teenagers who had played PlaySmart showed fewer symptoms of depression compared with the control group. Of particular interest is the fact that the benefits of the intervention were not limited to the period immediately after playing the game. One year later, the difference remained evident.

The researchers also found that students who played PlaySmart had a more positive attitude toward seeking psychological help, as early as after the six weeks of the intervention. Furthermore, according to the research team, the effect of PlaySmart did not vary significantly according to gender, ethnicity, school grade, economic status or family history of substance use. This is considered important for an intervention that could potentially be implemented more widely in schools and communities in the future.

Despite the encouraging findings, experts point out that digital games for promoting mental health are still a relatively new field of research. More studies are needed to clarify the role that such digital interventions could play within the broader framework of adolescent mental health care.



About the initiative

Dartmouth’s play2PREVENT (p2P) Lab is supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and collaborating with school in several states. In an interview with the Dartmouth Geisel School of Medicine News in 2025, founder Lynn Fielin explained that it was through her own children’s love for video games that she was inspired to start seeking funding for this initiative in 2009.

“Back when we started, after about six months we realized as a group of adults that we had no idea what teen-

agers thought. We needed to stop and start again, involving them in the whole process,” she explained in her interview. From the start, it was important to figure out how to gauge the teen mind and create something truly for them.

While PlaySmart focuses more on opioid addiction, p2P Lab has different games that cater to other issues faced by today’s youth. EmpowerED helps the player develop skills to combat negative thoughts, while another game titled SmokeSCREEN tackles nicotine and vaping addiction. PLAYTEST! is

another educational RPG, encouraging health check-ups and informing teens on STI/HIV testing. This February p2P Lab received a grant from the non-profit organization Proof Positive for a two-year initiative to build games for children on the autism spectrum.

At the core of their mission is producing scientific findings to add to the existing research on teens’ mental health and awareness. Additionally, p2P Lab has taken part in several conferences surrounding adolescent addiction prevention.

Giannis Efthimiou: ‘I’m interested in what I can’t control in painting’

In Efthimiou's work, there is a strange continuity: the painting is still very much wrought by hand, and the material still has the capacity to resist

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Efthimiou does not seem to view this possibility as accidental to the process. It is integral to it.

Which may imbue a story he tells me about his early years with a different weight. He grew up in Corinth, without—as he says—having any real idea what contemporary artists do. It was his aunt Efi who noticed his inclination and suggested the School of Fine Arts on Tinos. And so, when he was confronted with art for the very first time, at eighteen, he was standing before a block of marble, not an empty canvas. The task: to square it off. His hands bled and blistered, and if a corner broke off from a misplaced strike, there was no way to glue it back on. You had to start lowering the surface all over again. The distance from marble to paper pulp seems vast. In Efthimiou's work, however, there is a strange continuity: the painting is still very much wrought by hand, and the material still has the capacity to resist.

Speaking about his trajectory to date, Efthimiou also returns to the people who stood by him, referring to some with an almost familial tenderness—as if they parented him in their own way, as he puts it. These pivotal figures include Kostas Karasavvidis, who is not just a framer to him, but an artist in his own right and a wonderful human being; Evi Konstantinidou from Evripides Art Gallery, with her long career on the gallery scene; as well as Tasos and Christina Mantzavinos, whom he thanks in particular for their help regarding his relationship with the Skoufa Gallery. The people to whom he feels he owes a debt of gratitude also include Paraskevi Zerva, curator of the Lafcadio Hearn exhibition in Thessaloniki, which provides the occasion for our meeting and discussion today.

Lately, another world has intruded into his familiar iconography: that of Lafcadio Hearn. The catalyst was a group exhibition at the Vafopouleio Cultural Center in Thessaloniki. Efthimiou started reading Hearn with a view to creating a single piece, but found himself re-



Speaking about his trajectory to date, Efthimiou returns to the people who stood by him, like his aunt Efi, who suggested he study at the Athens School of Fine Arts.

turning to his stories over and over again, drawn to the mix of metaphysical, fairytale and macabre elements, and to that strange proximity of darkness and humor.

And the one piece became several. Our conversation proceeds in much the same way, moving from a material to painting, from painting to life, and from there to the question of whether the many things that happen in a studio ever find a way out into the world.

Do you feel you have found your painting idiom, or are you still searching for it?

I don't know if I'm searching for it. I think it emerges. And I am ready—or not—to see it. There are times when something may emerge, but I'm not yet ready to see it. With paper pulp, however, I feel I have found a field that allows me to say whatever I want, however I want. It won't be judged as much against the history of paint-

ing, against the great masters, or my own teachers and art education. And that gives me the peace of mind I need to do anything. I don't think it ends there, though. If you are to feel alive, it needs to be constantly subverted. And, naturally, an alphabet gradually emerges out of that. For instance, I might paint a wave using certain brushstrokes because of something I saw once, and then that evolves from work to work. That's how an idiom is created. I

want it to be my own language. That enables me to say what I want the way I want. And nature helps immensely with this. Observing it is an inexhaustible resource.

You started out in sculpture. What traces has that experience left in the way you paint today?

I started working in marble on Tinos, though I never actually went there with that in mind. I came from a provin-

cial background, in Corinth, where I didn't even know what contemporary artists did. My aunt, Efi, had seen that I had some talent and suggested that school.

So there I was, at the age of 18, standing in front of a huge block of marble. The first exercise was to square off the rock. The relationship you form with such a hard material—my hands bled and blistered—brings you into very direct, literal contact with manual labor. And it teaches you not to get discouraged. If you hit the chisel wrong and a corner breaks off, you just have to lower the entire surface all over again. You can't add material back on, like you would with clay. That, I think, is what has carried over most into my painting: the sheer physicality of the work, and the stamina it takes. Rather than any specific sculptural quality of the painted surface.

Paper pulp has become a signature material in your work. How did you first discover it?

The initial spark came from some works by David Hockney, which made use of this technique. And they set me off on a quest. For about two years, I experimented constantly—with more or less moisture, with color and without, doing things in different ways.

For me, this put the *matiere* more center stage. That was the big gamble: I believed, and still do, that paper pulp can become a new painting medium in its own right. Not just a different way of doing something that already exists. No, I see it acquiring its own dynamic which shapes the drawing and the painting. My explorations began with the belief that a new kind of painting could emerge from it. Which is why different elements find their way into my works. In some places there is a pronounced *matiere*, in others the surface becomes highly textured, elsewhere there is an almost collage feel. I have played with it in many ways, and I feel the possibilities are endless.

How much do you wrest control of a piece before you start making it?

I start with something in mind, but I want to be in

a state where I'm ready to subvert it. It never goes exactly as planned. When physical labor is involved—and especially when working with a material even I don't fully understand yet—things can take many unexpected turns. You start out taking it somewhere, and it takes you somewhere else. There is also the detachment process, during which the entire work can be destroyed. I might have worked on something for a month, but when I peel the paper off, it tears and that's the end of that. I don't want to remove that risk, however—it creates tension, gets my adrenaline flowing. If I ever reached a point where I was simply producing something ready-made, why wouldn't I just change jobs? What would be in that for me?

Is painting for you more a product or a process?

In the past, I cared hardly at all about the end result. It was the process that interested me. I could work on something for six months and, in the end, all that remained was the imprint of the process that had led there. But it was honing my instinct and teaching me how not to get discouraged.

Painting has become a lens through which I read many things in my life. Recently, I was on a trip with a friend and he asked me when I had last felt truly happy. What came to mind was a day I'd painted a landscape I really liked. I had such an adrenaline rush when I finished, I had to go outside and it felt like I was high on something. And that tells you something. It can also be problematic, because I have a tendency to filter everything through painting: my relationships, my daily routine, other activities.

Still, I try not to lose what got me here, which is the joy of creating. I don't like the whole “tortured artist” thing at all. I'm interested in being well so that I can paint. I don't want to forfeit my life to do it; I want to have my life so that I can do it.

Can success and the market affect that relationship?

I think about it and engage in constant self-criticism. You say to yourself: you do what you do, you sell it, you make money from it—but why are you doing it in the end? On the other hand, you have no choice but to operate within a system. Otherwise, I would have to go live in a cave and paint. That said, I didn't try to manufacture an identity from the start, so people would say “That's an Efthimiou.” I didn't work toward



A paint-splattered work station featuring brushes and open containers of paint.

ending up where I am today. I tried to paint well. Painting interests me. The rest just happened. And I was lucky because I crossed paths with people who appreciated the work and helped me immensely.

In the Lafcadio Hearn exhibition at the Vafopouleio, what was it that drew you most to Hearn's world?

The intense metaphysical element. Reading his work generated immensely powerful images for me, but not just cerebrally—they touched me emotionally and activated my imagination.

I am generally drawn to this contradiction between tragedy and irony. Hearn had something slightly childlike about him, like a character from a fairy tale, and at the same time something very dark and profound. And those three elements—the childlike, the dark and the metaphysical—resonated deeply with something that was probably already inside



The artist walked us through his process and the way he approaches creating.

then returned to play for people.

What are you working on right now? Are you already thinking about your one-man show?

It's still early days for a solo exhibition. I have some ideas, but I try not to dwell on it, because when you start thinking about an exhibition, it can impose rigidities and limitations on your work.

I don't work on a single, specific theme. I might do the Hearn pieces, then go back to landscapes, or start something else. At the moment, there's also a new body of work that started out as small pieces I made for a book, then began to develop in a puzzle-like way. I don't like to keep things too shut off. It's dangerous to learn to operate in just one way, and then be left incapable of working in any other. I want to be able to see the drawing as apart from myself, too. When I work from nature, nature subverts what I have in my head; when I work with my imagination, it subverts what I have taken from nature. It's a constant back and forth between the two.

You have used the phrase “by us, for us.” Do you believe that contemporary art in Greece communicates with the public in a real way?

I'll tell you something very simple. I have friends, young people, who, when I tell them I'm a painter and exhibit at the Skoufa Gallery, reply: “We've never gone in because we thought you had to pay an admission fee.” And we're talking about people who aren't completely removed from our reality here. I have accepted that painting isn't a dominant art form today. I know what I do, and I'm okay with that. But I would really like to communicate more. Because we often feel it's done “by us, for us.”

On the one hand, there is the gallery, you exhibit your work in that gallery, and, naturally, you want to sell so you can make a living. But this inevitably caters to a specific financial demographic. On the other hand, there is a segment of contemporary art that moves from exhibition to exhibition, in different spaces, but even that can ultimately end up being “by us, for us,” catering to an intellectual elite. I think the art can often fail to communicate in a real way in either case.

I would like there to be more space for young artists and a more concerted effort from the institutions. A space where young people can show their work and be given a chance. The system itself might reject you afterwards; but you must be given the opportunity to test your mettle first.

me. I didn't start out intending to make a series of works. I just wanted to create the piece for the show, but an entire body of work emerged in the end.

What exactly will we see at the Vafopouleio?

The piece is essentially a jigsaw puzzle of stories. I read three or four of Hearn's books and, for some reason, certain stories stuck with me—ones where death plays a leading role, sometimes in a strange and darkly humorous way. I played with these in the rest of the works in the series, too.

One of the stories that touched me most was about a musician staying in a monastery; every night, a samurai would lead him to a palace to play music. He later discovers that he has actually been going to a cemetery and playing for the dead. It touched me so, because he was an artist: he was playing for something higher than this world,

There’s a Legal Fight Brewing at Oktoberfest

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The season of beer and lederhosen has been clouded by allegations Munich is running a cartel that even a prince can’t crack

Continued from Page One

He has gathered 21,000 of 35,000 signatures needed to call a citywide referendum that could get his beer inside the gates next year.

Each fall, Munich is taken over by Oktoberfest. This year, 6.7 million revelers are expected to descend upon the city beginning Sept. 19 to guzzle beer and pump an estimated \$1.8 billion into the economy.

To preserve the festival’s flavor, the city only permits beer from approved “established and reputable” Munich breweries that brew to a 1487 purity law: from barley, hops and water procured from a well within city limits. As a result, six breweries have brought all the booze for decades. Even the Prince of Bavaria—whose family invented Oktoberfest—was turned away.

Marx has gone all out to meet the purity standard, pursuing a drilling permit for the well for two years and raising €12.4 million to dig on the Giesinger lot next to a BMW battery research facility. Now he needs the city council’s blessing, or approval via citizen referendum, to join the list of approved vendors.

Rules protect the festival’s quality and character, said Christian Scharpf, Munich’s head of labor and economic affairs, who oversees the festival.

One drinker’s tradition is another’s cartel. German antitrust lawyer Fabian Vetter said the big lager companies’ control of the market seemed like a sketchy syndicate—one in which the Bavarian state itself participates, since it owns one of them.

Lukas Kestler, another German antitrust lawyer, said Munich is entitled to set the festival’s rules and choose breweries that comply, adding that Oktoberfest wasn’t a cartel because the rules weren’t set by participants. (Neither Vetter nor Kestler represents Oktoberfest participants or hopefuls.)

Scharpf said the current beer rules had been upheld in court.

Prince Luitpold of Bavaria tried in the 1980s to get his beer into Oktober-



A waitress serves mugs of beer during the 187th Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany, September 17, 2022.

fest. His brewery initially lay outside town limits. When he offered to bring a portable brewery and brew on festival grounds, the city refused, saying too many other producers would want to do the same.

Then he opened a permanent brewery in a

Munich park, but the city banned it from selling beer for off-premises consumption and said it didn’t have enough production capacity.

“Whatever you do, the city of Munich will try to find new excuses to block new suppliers,” the prince

said. He sued, alleging a cartel and sales monopoly.

Judges were unmoved that Luitpold’s forebears had brewed in the region since 1260, written the purity law and invented Oktoberfest for his great-great-grandfather King Ludwig I’s 1810 wedding. A Munich

court ruled against Luitpold in 1990.

This year the argument spilled over to the tents that house the festivities. These structures can be larger than a football field, rise several stories and hold 8,000 people.

Local restaurant Münchner Stubn sued the

city in May after it lost bids to manage larger tents, alleging the process favors families that have run tents for generations by awarding points for tradition.

Scharpf said courts upheld the bidding process in the past. The Bavarian Supreme Court hears the case Sept. 11.

Alexander Egger, CEO of Münchner Stubn, wants bidding opened to vendors across the European Union. He said it would increase competition and lower prices. Last year, some tents including his charged €15.80 (\$18.55) for a liter of beer—about 30% more than typical prices in Munich’s city center.

The suit stoked fears that if foreign companies manage tents, they could introduce foreign beer and food.

“Wouldn’t it be a horror vision if we had to drink little glasses of Kölsch, or if döner kebab and pizza were on every corner of the festival grounds?” Christian Schottenhamel, whose family has operated Oktoberfest’s oldest tent since 1867, asked in a May Instagram video. (Kölsch is from Cologne, a city 350 miles away.)

Egger, a Munich native who has gone to Oktoberfest every year since age 3, insists his proposal wouldn’t affect the menus.

Fights about tradition are practically a tradition of their own at Oktoberfest. Twenty years ago, the hot topics were a smoking ban and carving out space for traditional Bavarian music. More recently, tensions boiled over organic chicken. And there is the perennial tsk-tsk over racy, inauthentic dirndls.

Yet some customs are younger than they look. Beer from outside Munich was welcome for much of the 19th century, and breweries could serve a wider variety of beers, said Andreas Krennmair, an Austrian beer historian. Dirndls and lederhosen only became the dress code in the 1990s.

Giesinger’s Marx knows getting into Oktoberfest could mean giving up the brand’s underdog identity.

“If we reach our goal to go to Oktoberfest, it’s not the rebel brand anymore,” Marx said. “Maybe people won’t like us anymore.”



A worker prepares a beer tent ahead of this year’s Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany, August 26, 2026.