

Google is quietly testing out new ways to crush the human spirit

Column: We must continue to fight technofeudalism, Ariana Bindman writes

By **Ariana Bindman**

Editor's note: This story contains descriptions of suicidal ideation. If you are in distress, call the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline 24 hours a day at 988, or visit 988lifeline.org for more resources.

A few weeks ago, while visiting my parents in Southern California, my dad showed me a photo of my deceased grandpa that I'd never seen before. For decades, my father has fastidiously documented our lives through 35mm film, grainy home footage, and loose audio recordings, all of which are now stored on a messy mosaic of mini discs and carefully labeled flash drives. Dated as it is, our family treasures this analog media for how it preserves memories of our departed loved ones while reminding us of who they actually were.

This particular photo from the early 2000s was different, though, because it was uploaded to Gemini, Google's artificial intelligence assistant. Suddenly, like a marionette, my grandpa's body became animated, and he spoke in a voice that wasn't his own. It was disturbing and almost violating — a deepfake of a person I loved. Now, the company is nudging us toward an even more phantasmagoric reality by quietly pushing similar artificial intelligence tools on

its homepage, which a Google representative confirmed to SFGATE on Monday.

If you opened up an Incognito tab this week, you probably saw that the browser's classic search button was replaced by three new functions: "Create images," which basically generates AI visual slop, along with "Brainstorm" and "Ask about files," which both appear to function the exact same way.

Though company representatives said in an email to SFGATE that this "small desktop experiment" doesn't change its core search functionality, removing the actual search button from the homepage is deeply insidious because it quietly herds us away from Google's revolutionary search engine (Google is, after all, a verb) and toward its AI tools instead. Now it encourages us to outsource our creativity and critical thinking skills to a multibillion-dollar entity that already covertly harvests our data and uses our images, audio files and It feels absurd and redundant to explain why artificial intelligence is a threat to humanity, because at this point, the evidence is overwhelming.

It hallucinates. It erodes public trust. It devours natural resources, harms our communities and threatens to destroy the arts and much-needed news publishing industry. Though this technology has been unleashed upon the masses, no guardrails have been established to protect its users from harm. Already, we're witnessing the consequences.

In 2023, ChatGPT gave a teenage boy in San Jose advice on drugs and how to recover from benders, even sending him playlists to match his highs. About two years later, his family found him dead of an overdose. In 2025, the parents of a 16-year-old boy who took his own life accused OpenAI of giving him advice on how to plan a "beautiful suicide," according to the family's attorney. This year, Grok's AI photo editing feature unleashed a torrent of fabricated nude images of real people, some of whom were minors.

For years now, Silicon Valley's technofeudal overlords have been trying to force AI down our throats, and we simply can't let them. We cannot normalize the use of ugly, invasive smart glasses, and we can't give these companies any more power than they already have by relying on their psychosis-inducing AI tools.

Collaborating with others and learning from each of our real, lived experiences — even if they're imperfect — is what keeps our spirits alive. We can't let AI rewrite our history, and we certainly can't let it dictate our future.