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HOME, SWEET HOME

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC REVIVES DEBATES ABOUT HOMESCHOOLING

**By Mukta Dharmapurikar, Johanna Eichler
and Aaron Ming Meyer**

While her neighbors rush down the street to catch the school bus, 13-year-old Lilah Hadden starts her school day at home. After spending the morning on math and creative writing with her mother, she takes a violin class online, finishing her day with independent reading. Homeschooling has worked well for her.

“I’m getting to ... learn more of what I actually want to learn about,” Lilah says, noting that she’s particularly passionate about music. But if it weren’t for the pandemic, the idea to school at home would never have crossed her mind.

Covid-19 has forced students around the globe to learn without physically going to school, as entire states and countries went through long periods of lockdown. And it’s sparked new interest in homeschooling alternatives in places ranging from Durham, North Carolina to Hamburg, Germany.

In Germany, homeschooling has been banned since 1919. Students have discovered that alternative school arrangements can offer more flexibility to manage differences, pandemic stress and distractions.

Homeschooling increased significantly during the pandemic in the United States, rising from 5.4% of households in April 2020 to 11.1% by September of that year. Students like Lilah have found the flexibility of learning surprisingly appealing.

However, that same option doesn’t exist in many other countries. In the European Union, it’s illegal to homeschool in Germany, the Netherlands and Spain, and Sweden’s regulations are so strict that it amounts to a ban there, too. But just as in the U.S., many students in these countries have become interested in such alternatives. Partly as a result of the pandemic, groups are now joining forces to fight for fewer restrictions.

In Germany, homeschooling has been illegal since 1919, enforced through hefty fines and even police raids. As a result, it’s estimated that fewer than 1000 German families choose to teach their kids at home in a normal year.

Alina, a 16-year-old German student, really enjoyed online learning during the pandemic, which created an environment similar to that of homeschooling. “I could concentrate much better than in class,” she said. “I could work much more efficiently.”

As a result, she believes that homeschooling comes with a lot of benefits, many of which cannot be provided in a regular school setting.

Studying at home is more flexible and can promote independence, organization and self motivation. Parents have an easier time accounting for student’s preferences and capabilities, adapting the teaching methods, and prioritizing weaknesses and strengths. Some studies have even shown that homeschoolers score above students attending traditional schools.

From wanting to travel the world, to being dissatisfied with negative environments at schools, to prioritizing religious beliefs, an increasing number of parents in the U.S. are opting to teach their kids at home.

Homeschooling can also benefit students with special needs, who make up 38% of the homeschooled population

in the U.S., according to the National Special Education Advocacy Group.

“If you’re sending a kid with dyslexia and dysgraphia and dyscalculia to school, [they might] get really frustrated,” Lilah noted. “If they can be in homeschool, that’s going to help a lot more because they’re getting the help they need, and they can learn at their own pace.”

So why is homeschooling in Germany illegal in the first place? The responsible authorities say they focus on the well-being of the children and want to give every child equal educational opportunities.

When the homeschooling ban went into effect, the German economy was still heavily reliant on farming, and many families relied on their children for additional labor. Farm children would therefore often be kept at home and could not visit school, preventing them from getting an education like the children of rich families. A ban on home schooling also allowed students with different social backgrounds to mix in classes.

Another point against the legalization of homeschooling is the increase of

domestic violence in Germany during the pandemic. Some teachers in Germany even gave students special codes to alert them in the case of domestic violence. According to an article in the *Freisinnige Zeitung*, children should not be solely educated by their parents, because it would allow parents to fuel them with their own beliefs and ideologies, isolating them from society. This could explain why politicians and authorities are reluctant to legalize homeschooling in Germany.

While the pandemic brought chaos to education systems worldwide, it also has enabled new perspectives on homeschooling. As a result, momentum is shifting away from Germany's strict policies. Alina's opinion is that "every student should decide for themselves whether they like homeschooling," and that "it's not good that the state interferes with the way parents want to educate their children."

To put those sentiments into action, organizations such as Carpe Diem, a private, state-accredited school founded in 2003, are offering online classes for German students, arguing that factors like social anxiety or exceptional talent in

in sports or music could prevent them from attending public schools. Others, such as parent lobbying group Elternlobby, have started petitions since the onset of the pandemic to legalize homeschooling. And some families are fighting back against the government. The case of the Wunderlich family from the state of Hesse, which claimed that the German law violated its basic human rights, went all the way to the European Court of Human Rights, but the court ruled in favor of Germany.

Organizations like the Elternlobby continue to speak out, and Germany is facing an important decision. The pandemic has brought immense change, but only time will tell whether German homeschooling will ever be permitted.

As schools return to in-person instruction in the U.S., meanwhile, the decision to learn from home will be left to individuals. Students like Lilah will be facing a difficult decision on whether or not to return to school. While the U.S. and Germany have gone their separate ways on homeschooling, one thing rings true for both countries: education as we know it will never quite look the same again.





CLICKING FOR FUTURE

ALTERNATIVE SEARCH ENGINES HELP STUDENTS SURF THE WEB SUSTAINABLY

By Janne Wilsdorf and Milica Stanojic

Looking for feasible, effective and easy ways to stop climate change has become an important goal in our day-to-day lives. As a first measure, long-accustomed noxious habits need to be broken. Achieving sustainability is one of the most basic known approaches to this theme.

However, the concept of sustainability could well be combined with another important part of our daily lives: surfing the internet.

The idea of sustainable web surfing was immensely influenced by self-proclaimed eco-friendly search engine start-ups. A recent and ideal example is a German company called Ecosia. Ecosia's corporate purpose is to plant trees whenever someone uses their internet browser. Its homepage ticks off in real-time the number of trees it says are planted by Ecosia users (at last count: 134,335,671). The company claims to donate at least 80% of its profits to fund tree-planting programs.

Despite these good intentions, critics remain suspicious and share their doubts. If you dig deeper into the topic, you will find that the tree-planting policy is only activated if a user actually clicks on ads - and not by simply browsing with Ecosia.

And more and more skeptics are asking whether planting trees really is the best measure to stop climate change. So in the end, most people just stick with Google, because we all know it and it is not too circuitous to suddenly change the search engine in the long-term.

However, the Helene Lange Gymnasium, a Unesco-project public high school located in Hamburg, tried to work with Ecosia. Student government introduced the search engine and was able to plant 51 trees. Charlotte Heuser, an 11th grader at the school, says this motivated her to use Ecosia for extensive research, but she also admits that she doesn't use the alternative search engine more than Google. "Come to think of it, though," she says, "I should, since I can't think of much that speaks against it."

One issue, according to this student and others, is that sometimes the order of results is different on Ecosia, since Google has more information or pages. "When you hear that you have contributed to planting a certain number of trees, I think you feel like you're making a difference," Heuser says.

Johanna Eichler, another student from this climate-conscious school, likes the overall idea but still is not persuaded enough. “I personally don’t use it yet, so I’m afraid I can’t answer whether it works better. But I do think it could be an easy way to make a change for the environment, because I think changing all these small habits to environment-friendly alternatives can really add up,” Eichler says.

Fortunately, Google is quite aware of its responsibility in climate protection and claims itself carbon neutral since 2007. There is something ominous about Google's statement, though. The company has been investing in renewable energies and more ecological technologies for a certain amount of time. Thus, it was able to report its carbon neutrality early on. In fact, the infamous balance has not been achieved by any means because of Google’s restructured business activities. Instead, some of the rather affirmative and advantageous aspects arise from the fact that agricultural businesses have been given facilities that capture and moderate methane emissions from livestock farming. All in all, these and

other companies would have to make their own contribution to climate protection, but instead Google was able to take credit for the savings.

By now, you're probably wondering, “Are sustainable web searching engines truly recommendable?”

The simple answer is: Yes. Sustainable web surfing is definitely worth a try.

Whether planting trees is the best measure to stop climate change remains a question. But using alternative search engines is a simple first step toward the universal aim of protecting the environment and saving our planet for the next generation.

With this mentality, it should be easy to switch from the all-too-familiar Google to Ecosia or any other sustainable web surfing engine, as long as you are aware of the actual background and “environmentally friendly” strategies.

The future of our planet is priceless. In many decades from now, future generations will be keenly grateful for your commitment, no matter how you choose to commit. Now, it’s our time to make a difference. Only you can guarantee a salutary future by preserving our environment.





WHERE'S THE BEEF?

BY SUNAYA MUELLER, YAMUNA SIEBER AND
LARA FRY

**It's cool to be vegan, but are all those meat substitutes
really so healthy for the environment - and for us?**

Turkey or tofurkey, vegan schnitzel or beefsteak? Standing in front of a supermarket freezer, it's up to you whether to choose between conventional or plant-based meat.

From the United States to Europe and farther afield, plant-based meat alternatives are rapidly gaining in popularity. It's cool to be vegan, yes, but it's also better for the environment, the reasoning goes. But are those meat substitutes — often produced with additives, wrapped in pretty plastic and imported from far away — really so sustainable and healthy? Nutritionists voice a word of caution.

"With vegan meat, there is more processing, more packaging and likely more sodium," says Vashti Verbowski, a registered dietitian from the state of Washington.

Meatless meat has been around in various forms for well over a century. John Harvey Kellogg created a peanut-based meatless meat called Nuttose in 1896 before going on to popularize cereal as an alternative breakfast food. In recent years, vegan meat has exploded in popularity, particularly but not only in the U.S. A recent study by the Good Food

Institute showed that plant-based food has become "a fundamental component of the global food system."

There are good reasons for this trend. According to an August 2020 Stanford University study, plant-based meat alternatives reduce cardiovascular risk factors compared with red meat.

"Vegan versions are healthier than the full beef products," says Matt Ruscigno, a registered dietitian from Los Angeles, California, who has been vegan for 25 years.

The rise of vegan alternatives to meat in social settings — like the Beyond Burgers now widely available in restaurants throughout the U.S. — has helped "people stick to their eating pattern," according to Ruscigno. "The reason people give up eating vegan or plant-based is because of the social situations and not being able to find the foods they like," he says. "If someone is eating predominantly whole plant foods, and they are able to get a vegan burger when they go out with friends, they are more likely to stick to that eating plan."

And it's caught on in other countries, too. In Germany the rise of plant-based eating has become so popular that

consumption of meat in 2020 was lower per head than at any other point since record keeping started in 1989. One possible explanation for the decline in meat consumption is a combined focus on conscious diet and climate protection goals.

Germany and France are at about the same level of annual meat consumption, with roughly 80 kilos consumed per capita. Considered globally, national differences can be particularly stark, especially when comparing the U.S., at 123 kilos per capita, with India, where annual consumption of meat is just 4 kilos per capita.

Nonetheless, an undeniable wave of change has swept over Germany, not only in eating habits but also in the vegetarian and vegan options available to consumers. Companies offering alternatives to meat products have sprung up over the last couple of years. And even traditional meat producers that are household names, such as Rügenwalder Mühle (founded in 1834), have joined newer market players like Veggyfriends and Like Meat. But as good as these veggie products sound, meat substitutes are far from perfect.

Buying and consuming plant-based meat has both environmental and health disadvantages, note even some of the biggest proponents of plant-based nutrition. “I think vegan meat can be a good alternative,” says Verbowski, who dubs herself “The Kitchen Dietitian.” “My only concern is the degree of processing and even more plastic. If you are only buying your own legumes, beans, and lentils, you can potentially have much less plastic waste.”

In Germany, Rügenwalder Mühle sells both normal meat and vegetarian substitutes, which means that those who buy substitutes inadvertently support the company’s meat production.

Many plant-based products seem to be healthy at first glance, but they are not organic. Valess’s products fall into this category. Among the drawbacks of plant-based meat alternatives: transporting soy—an ingredient in plant-based alternatives—across continents (from, say, Brazil to Germany) increases carbon dioxide emissions. Meat substitutes also often lack the vitamin B12, Verbowski says.

There are solutions to this dilemma.

Instead of solely consuming plant-based meat, Ruscigno and Verbowski recommend sticking as much as possible to whole foods. “Get protein from legumes, make sure you’re actually eating fruits and vegetables,” urges Ruscigno. “Make sure you are emphasizing leafy greens and berries.”

“Why not just have black beans, or have the whole foods version?” agrees Verbowski. “The closer to the whole, the better it is for your health.”

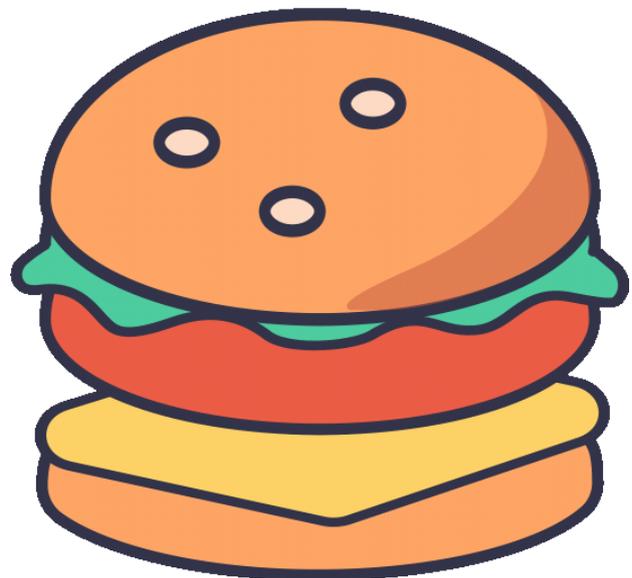
The future holds promise for meat eaters as well as vegans. For meat eaters looking to eat more sustainably, Swiss company Mirai Foods is researching and developing a method of cultivating beef from animal cells.

Through this method, which is still under development, a cow’s stem-cell sample is extracted through biopsy, isolated in liquid nitrogen, and then reproduced by cell division. The reproduced cells develop further as muscles and fats and are finally put together as beef.

The startup aims to produce up to one million tons of beef from just a single sample, and it aspires to offer this lab-

grown meat at a fair price. As projects like this succeed, they will help the development of more advanced and eco-friendly substitutes to farm-raised meat.

Ruscigno is confident that vegan meat can allow both Americans and Germans to transition to eating more plant-based foods. “My hope is that meat alternatives make eating more vegan and more plant-based easier for people. I am optimistic that we can get more people to eat vegan food if it’s presented to them in the right way.”





TEEN SPIRIT

BY ANVITHA REDDY, CHARLOTTE HEUSER
AND EMMA DIRCKS

**Youth-founded, youth-run non-profits find solutions
for the pandemic era and beyond**

In the middle of a Covid-19 lockdown packed with difficulties with distance learning, teachers at the Schmalkalden Elementary School in Thuringia, Germany, learned that the digital tool they had been using didn't meet the country's strict data-privacy restrictions.

"A parent at the school asked whether I could manage to develop a program from scratch over the weekend," said Mathias Wickenhagen, a 20-year-old programmer in the neighborhood. "And I did."

TaskCards, the online platform that Wickenhagen developed, is a digital pinboard inspired by Padlet that's also compliant with German data-privacy laws. Originally intended as a quick save for just a few teachers in eastern Germany, TaskCards has become widely popular throughout Europe.

Across the world, Chloe Yan, a 17-year-old resident of Burlingame, California, walked into her computer science class in 2019 and noticed the absence of girls. The lack of support inspired her to find a community, so she joined GirlGenius, an entirely virtual international nonprofit that connects young women interested in STEM fields (science, technology,

engineering and math) through panels, workshops and an online magazine. Since then, she has become executive director of the magazine.

While these international nonprofits have been thriving in virtual settings, the world is slowly approaching a post-pandemic era. In anticipation of that day, these organizations plan to adapt just as quickly to in-person activities as they adapted to the digital realm, all in order to better serve their communities.

Up until now, TaskCards has operated entirely virtually — after all, it was created as a result of the switch to online learning. The pandemic caused the need for it and allowed it to succeed. Since his own school experience wasn't long ago at all, Wickenhagen understood what teachers and their students needed in order to learn from a distance. And he sees that their interest in digital solutions remains even as schools reopen.

"We weren't interested in profiting from data collection or turning a huge profit," Wickenhagen said. "From the start, this was meant to help teachers and students. We want to meet their needs, to make it a really useful tool."

TaskCards was born out of a problem: without it, teachers would have had to deliver paper handouts to students' doorsteps. In another part of Germany, Christopher Reiners and Gero Embser felt the lack of support in education caused by Covid-19's closure of schools. So in March 2020 they came up with the idea of Corona School, a nonprofit association to assist students and staff with the transition to online learning. In just a few months, the site had more than 20,000 users.

For GirlGenius – which is based in the United States and serves girls around the world, including in India, Spain, Singapore and Malaysia – the pandemic caused no significant harm. Rather, the organization saw stay-at-home orders as an opportunity to start new initiatives.

“Since we are a fully virtual team, we weren't hit too hard by the pandemic, and we actually had very few downsides,” Yan said.

GirlGenius has hosted about 40 online events. Its summer 2020 STEAM conference drew more than 2,000 participants. “And those [events] were a huge pivot,” Yan said. The group had previously been focused mainly on

production of its magazine. The organization also has developed technical workshops in animation, panels with women in STEM fields, and “Ask Me Anything” sessions with women who are well established in STEM. All of these virtual events were launched in response to increased online activity because of the pandemic.

But as schools and public places begin to open up again, nonprofits that operate entirely virtually will face a unique challenge: keeping their momentum going once people return to local, in-person resources.

The founders of Corona School recently decided to rename their organization Lern-Fair (Learn-Fair, in English) in response to the movement back to in-person activities. According to the group, more than 200 volunteers are today helping to increase the ways the nonprofit supports their communities.

Barely six months after its development, meanwhile, TaskCards is catching on across Europe, with licensing requests from Austria to Finland and the United Kingdom, according to D:Sign Systems, a company that supports the project.

“Post-Covid, online learning will remain a crucial part of education and schooling, no matter if from home or in person,” Wickenhagen said. The programmer, who now works with two other people on TaskCards, continues to develop and improve the technology, drawing on direct input from students and teachers alike.

expanding services to other children with an eye to a post-pandemic world. Afghan refugees and young cancer patients are just two groups it has targeted.

“[Members of] the Afghani national army and their kids have to flee the country for different political reasons, so we started offering sessions to their

In the U.S., GirlGenius is seeking to turn its virtual magazine into a print publication, as physical libraries begin to reopen their doors.

“For a while now, we’ve wanted to print out magazines and put them into libraries,” Yan said. “We’ve been avoiding this because of Covid, but when things open up, [we want to] shift from a digital standpoint to making things more physical.”

Other nonprofits are looking ahead to a post-pandemic era, too. Telementors, a Texas-based organization created by high schoolers Amruth Nandish and Saathwik Saladi during the pandemic, connects children of healthcare workers to student mentors. Now the group is

kids,” said Nandish, 17-year-old founder and director of Telementors.

“Terminally ill children with cancer are always in some isolation, like children of healthcare workers are, but they’re always in it – post-Covid, pre-Covid and during Covid. If they got that interaction with a teenage mentor, that would bring some light into their day, so that’s what our next venture is.”

Even before the pandemic, teenagers proposed unique solutions to problems in their communities. As vaccination rates increase and institutions find ways to provide in-person experiences, teenagers are equipping their organizations to tackle these changes and serve the public in new ways.



ROLE MODELS

GERMAN QUOTAS TRY AND TRY AGAIN TO BOOST WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

**By Iliana Garner, Philipp Rieß
and Thora-Marit Bilz**

Women representation on corporate boards remains a problem in many countries around the world. Yet the introduction of quotas to address this has caused debates among current and future leaders.

Norway was the first country to introduce binding quotas for women on corporate boards back in 2003, and the initiative has been successful. But the recent passage of a law to enforce the women's quota in Germany, after earlier efforts didn't seem to lead to the intended consequences, has reignited debate about the pros and cons of quotas for women in the U.S. and Europe alike.

"When women are not represented at the leadership table, then it's hard for women to be represented as consumers of your brands," says Robin Vogel, 56, vice president of global strategic sourcing at the American candy company Mars, Incorporated.

Having majored in engineering at college, Vogel knows first-hand how underrepresented women are in certain fields. But throughout her career, she just pushed on. "Walking into a meeting room where the majority of the attendees are men may have impacts on a number of women," she admits. "Frankly, I got used to it."

Since 2015, every company that is listed on the German stock exchange must fill at least 30% of its supervisory board seats with women. Companies that don't reach this goal have to give every seat that frees up to a woman. Right now, 100 companies in Germany are affected by the quota. And 3,500 more are obliged to provide data on how many women they plan to add to their boards.

The percentage of women on supervisory boards at these listed companies has risen to 36% from just 28% back in 2016, according to Germany's federal ministry for family affairs, senior citizens, women and youth. But privately held companies, which didn't need to make changes back in 2015, have hardly changed their board make-up at all. The vast majority of companies - 1,695 companies, representing roughly 81% - did not

have any women on their boards in the last 5 years, according to ministry data. More than 78% of the companies stated that they didn't establish a fixed number of women in their boards at all or didn't give any seat to a woman.

That's why, as of August 2021, all publicly traded German companies with four or more board members must have at least one woman on their management boards as well. These new binding specifications are supposed to strengthen the women's quota in Germany and to oblige companies to appoint women to management roles.

After 16 years in office, Angela Merkel, the first-ever female chancellor of Germany will leave office after German national elections in September. This new law, which is supposed to help women get into leadership roles, was one of Merkel's final pushes while in office.

Nine other countries have women's quotas right now, and all of them are European. Norway was the first country to initiate a quota almost 20 years ago, followed by Iceland, Austria, Greece and Spain. For Norway, the quota has worked well. About 41% of all leading positions in

business were filled by women in Norway in 2019, according to Springer Professional, a digital library.

In the United States, only the state of California has established a women's quota for big companies with more than 5 people sitting on the supervisory board. Darion Akins, Consul General of the United States for northern Germany, says gender quotas can do a lot of good if implemented well - while improperly implemented ones might do more harm than good.

"The approach with gender quotas in the U.S is slightly different" than in Europe, Akins explains. Unlike Germany, the U.S. doesn't regulate the overall percentage of women at the top of companies. Instead, U.S.-based companies tend to emphasize the individual. "When a company hires someone, we should look if the individual is qualified for this job," Akins explains. "These people do not necessarily have to be women. We must judge people for their qualifications, talents and capabilities, not their gender."

A supportive corporate atmosphere, also amongst colleagues, is just as

important for the advancement of talent. “People should advocate each other's talents,” Akins says. “In order to foster women’s positions in companies, a lot more men should be proactive and support women on their way up in their careers.”

If there were more of a dynamic in society encouraging women to strive for positions of power, it might be possible to strengthen women's confidence to strive for leadership roles without the need for gender quotas.

And that is precisely what concerns Vogel, the Mars executive. “What I worry about is women getting promoted [and becoming] the token woman,” Vogel says of quotas. “I do believe in setting goals for what you want... but I think there's more that can be done.”

That’s why she stresses the importance of mentorship to encourage women to reach the highest leadership levels. Companies, including Mars, provide Associate Resource Groups (ARG) to support women and other underrepresented groups. Vogel says she taps this group to mentor younger women.

One aim of the women's quota in

Germany is to encourage girls still in their teens to strive for leading positions in the future. While many adults share the concerns voiced by Vogel and Akins, more than 80% of female students and more than 60% of male students at German universities are optimistic about the future effects of the women's quota, according to a 2021 survey by Maastricht University and the job board Studitemps.

“The only thing I am afraid of is that I might be seen as the ‘quota woman.’” says Laetitia Kitching, a 17 year-old student at Johanneum, a high school in Hamburg, Germany. “You always hear about it in theory, but I have never spoken to someone who has had actual experiences with the women's quota.”

Speaking to women who want to achieve high positions of leadership, meanwhile, Vogel says: “Have confidence in your talents, know what you want, and don’t strive for perfection.”



THE GREAT DIVIDE

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THE PANDEMIC SPARKS A NEW WAVE OF HATE

By Isabelle Kotrba and Stine Kranz Horwitz

March 2020 started out just like any other late-winter month, but it turned into a nightmare.

“In what situation are we currently in and when will it be ending?” people on all continents wondered. The whole world quarantined. A battle between a virus and the world began, and over the next year and a half more than 4.55 million people died of Covid-19.

But Covid-19 didn’t only bring death and anxiety with it. It also brought a split in society.

Back in 2006, the students in the popular television film “High School Musical” sang, “We are all in this together.” In 2021, though, we are far from teamwork and equality. We have been going backwards in time, not forward. Women, people of color, LGBTQ+, Asians and many more still experience discrimination and racism every day.

Now, in various parts of the world, one culture is being blamed for a world pandemic.

Donald J. Trump, the 45th president of the U.S., fueled the trend by aggressively blaming China for the pandemic right from its outset. Throughout his final year in office, he routinely used phrases like “the China Virus,” “Wuhan virus,” and “kung flu.”

A recent study published by the University of California, San Francisco, shows that a single tweet by then-President Trump on March 16, 2020, led anti-Asian hashtags on the platform to rise “precipitously.” And anti-Asian hashtags, the study’s authors showed, are known predictors of hate crimes and the formation of hate groups.



Since then, Asians have increasingly experienced harassment and discrimination – and that unfortunate trend is not limited to the U.S. Many Asian-owned and Asian-run businesses have had to change strategies in order to keep afloat. Still others fear racism and attacks with hate as the motive in their homes and businesses. And although one might expect China to suffer the most, the rest of Asia is facing discrimination and stigma as well.

As teen journalists, we wanted to explore this symptom of the divide in our pandemic-era society. In a not-for-attribution interview, we got insights into what it's like as part of this community..

Our interviewee, who requested anonymity, is a Muslim woman born and raised in London and is of Bangladeshi background. She has dealt with a lot of discrimination in her life, such as microaggression, preconceptions and racism. She has dealt with many comments about her culture and often felt mistreated and misunderstood in daily interactions in the U.K.

Her father owns an Indian takeaway and she said: “They love our curry, but they don't like the ones making it.”

Next to her father's takeaway shop, there is a Chinese takeaway, she explains. And at the beginning of the pandemic, the shop was vandalized and had to be closed.

For the interviewee, this actually didn't come as a big surprise. Racism against East-Asians has increased a lot in the last two years, she says.

Nowadays, she has a hard time confronting people when they behave or speak in racist way, and she feels like her culture's values are still not accepted as much as other cultures, which leads to an increasingly evident split in society. And it's gotten worse as the pandemic drags on, she says.

This is just one person's experience, in one of many countries around the globe. Yet it's one that speaks volumes about our dichotomized society. How can we fight back against this development?



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best magazine



In summer 2021, the Amerikazentrum Hamburg, a binational German-American cultural institute, sponsored 18 high-school students in Hamburg and the U.S. to learn about international journalism in a “virtual newsroom.”

The tuition-free program consisted of 4 digital seminars. The participants developed news articles focused on one of the Amerikazentrum’s BEST program topics (Business, Entrepreneurship, Science and Technology).

Students worked in small cross-cultural teams to develop and produce their own pieces of journalism.

During the digital sessions, students learned reporting basics and media literacy from journalism instructors and working journalists in both the United States and Germany.

They learned about interviewing anyone anywhere, news judgment, writing compelling articles and pitching a story to editors. In addition, they learned about simplifying their writing, fact-checking their articles and publishing a story across various social-media channels.

This magazine is the product of their dedication and commitment to the BEST Virtual Newsroom. Each story reflects the invaluable transatlantic exchange of ideas that such cross-cultural teen collaboration can bring.

-Deborah Steinborn, Program Director