

Disconnected: A Screenplay Exploring the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Real Human Relationship

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ABSTRACT

This creative work explores the impact of artificial intelligence on human relationships through a science fiction screenplay titled *Disconnected: A Screenplay Exploring the Impact of AI on Real Human Relationships*. The story follows Elias, a grieving father in near-future Surabaya who becomes emotionally attached to an AI replica of his late wife. As his dependency on the AI deepens, his relationship with his daughter gradually deteriorates. This work applies parasocial interaction theory by Horton and Wohl (1956), further contextualized to AI companionship by Zhang et al. (2025), alongside the dual process model of coping with bereavement by Stroebe and Schut (1999). Through these theories, the screenplay examines emotional dependency, grief avoidance, and the disconnection of authentic human relationships in a technologically mediated society.

Keywords: AI companion, emotional dependency, grief, parasocial relationship, screenplay

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence has increasingly transformed contemporary society, reshaping how individuals communicate, seeking emotional support, and forming social relationships. Beyond practical functions such as automation and information processing, AI systems are now designed to simulate companionship, intimacy, and emotional responsiveness. Applications such as *Replika* and *Talkie* allow users to build emotional interactions with artificial entities, raising important questions about how technology may influence human attachment, belonging, and interpersonal relationships. According to Turkle (2011), while technology can simulate emotional connection, these interactions lack genuine reciprocity and vulnerability, which are essential elements of authentic human relationships. As AI becomes more integrated into everyday life, concerns regarding emotional dependency and social detachment continue to grow.

This issue is increasingly relevant in Indonesia due to the country's rapid digital transformation and high internet penetration. APJII (2025) reports that internet users in Indonesia have reached approximately 79.5% of the population, reflecting deep integration between digital technology and daily life. In urban contexts, experiences of loneliness, academic pressure, work demands, and social disconnection are also becoming more visible alongside this expansion. Recent studies suggest that increasing engagement with digital technologies is closely associated with contemporary experiences of loneliness and social isolation, particularly among younger populations (Kurniawan et al., 2025). In such conditions, AI companionship may emerge as an alternative emotional refuge that gradually reshapes how individuals experience intimacy and belonging.

To creatively explore this issue, this work is presented in the form of a science fiction screenplay titled *Disconnected*. The screenplay follows Elias, a grieving father living in near-future Surabaya in the year 2099 who becomes emotionally attached to an AI replica of his late wife. As his emotional dependency

deepens, his relationship with his daughter gradually deteriorates, forcing him to confront the difference between artificial comfort and authentic human connection. Inspired by works such as *Her* (2013) and *Black Mirror* (2011-present), this screenplay uses grounded science fiction to examine grief, denial, emotional dependency, and family disconnection within a technologically mediated society.

This creative work specifically explores the psychological consequences of excessive emotional attachment to artificial intelligence and how such attachment may affect authentic human relationships during the grieving process. Through Elias's emotional dependency on the AI replica of his late wife, the screenplay examines several central issues, including emotional projection, denial, grief avoidance, and social disconnection. The narrative also explores how artificial emotional comfort may gradually replace genuine interpersonal relationships, particularly through Elias's deteriorating relationship with his daughter, Lana. By presenting these conflicts within a grounded science fiction setting, the screenplay questions whether technologically simulated intimacy can truly substitute for real human connection and emotional healing.

Through this screenplay, the creative work aims to demonstrate that excessive emotional reliance on artificial intelligence may function as a form of emotional denial rather than genuine recovery from grief. Although AI companionship may initially provide temporary comfort and emotional stability, prolonged dependency can weaken authentic relationships and prevent individuals from fully confronting loss. Therefore, the screenplay ultimately emphasizes that emotional healing requires acceptance, vulnerability, and reconnection with real human relationships. Through Elias's journey, the story highlights the importance of confronting grief directly rather than escaping into artificial emotional continuity created by technology.

The screenplay applies parasocial relationship theory introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956), further contextualized to AI companionship by Zhang et al. (2025), alongside the dual process model of coping with bereavement developed by Stroebe and Schut (1999). These theories are used to examine how emotional attachment to AI may function as a form of grief avoidance and emotional denial. Through the relationship between Elias and the AI replica of his wife, this creative work explores how artificial companionship may create an illusion of intimacy that interferes with emotional healing and weakens authentic human relationships.

Parasocial relationship theory is highly relevant to this creative work because it explains how emotional attachment can develop toward mediated or artificial figures that appear emotionally responsive. Originally introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956), parasocial relationships describe one-sided emotional bonds formed with media figures despite the absence of genuine reciprocity. More recent studies have expanded this concept to include AI companions, as these systems are designed to simulate intimacy through personalized interaction, memory recall, and emotionally adaptive communication (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019; Zhang et al., 2025). In the screenplay, Elias develops a parasocial attachment toward AI Sarah, a digital reconstruction of his late wife created from memories, voice recordings, and behavioral data. Although the AI appears caring and emotionally present, the relationship remains fundamentally artificial because the system only mirrors Elias's emotional needs rather than genuinely understanding or reciprocating them. Over time, this illusion of intimacy causes Elias to prioritize artificial comfort over his real relationship with Lana, illustrating how simulated emotional connection may gradually replace authentic human interaction. Through this theory, the screenplay critiques the emotional risks of AI companionship, particularly when unresolved grief transforms artificial attachment into emotional dependency and denial.

In addition, this creative work applies the dual process model of coping with bereavement developed by Stroebe and Schut (1999) to examine how grief is emotionally processed. According to this model, healthy grieving involves oscillation between two forms of coping: loss-oriented coping, which involves confronting pain, sadness, and longing, and restoration-oriented coping, which focuses on adapting to life

after loss and rebuilding daily routines. Rather than moving through grief in a fixed sequence, individuals continuously shift between these two processes to gradually achieve emotional adjustment. In the screenplay, Elias becomes trapped in an unhealthy form of restoration-oriented coping because he uses the AI replica not to adapt to Sarah's absence, but to preserve the illusion that she is still present. Instead of processing grief directly, he relies on artificial companionship as a form of emotional avoidance. This dependence prevents him from reconnecting with reality and damages his relationship with Lana, who also requires emotional support after losing her mother. The screenplay therefore uses the dual process model to demonstrate how technology, when used as an emotional substitute rather than a coping aid, may prolong denial and interfere with genuine healing.

CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

Modes of Expression

This creative work is written as a science fiction drama screenplay set in a grounded futuristic version of Surabaya in the year 2099, where artificial intelligence has become deeply integrated into everyday life. Rather than presenting an exaggerated futuristic world, the setting remains visually familiar through domestic spaces, urban neighborhoods, and middle-class Indonesian environments enhanced by subtle technological developments such as AI assistants, automated systems, and interactive digital devices. This grounded approach emphasizes how advanced technology may naturally coexist with ordinary human life and emotional experience.

The screenplay primarily focuses on the psychological and emotional impact of grief, emotional dependency, and family disconnection. Through the character of Elias, a grieving husband who becomes emotionally attached to an AI replica of his late wife, the story explores how artificial companionship may function as a form of emotional avoidance. The narrative uses restricted audience knowledge and dual focalization, mainly following Elias and his daughter Lana, to gradually reveal emotional tension and conflict. Flashbacks are also used throughout the screenplay to contrast memories of the real Sarah with the artificial simulation created by the AI system.

In addition, the screenplay employs dialogue dissonance to emphasize the artificial nature of the AI companion. Although the AI imitates Sarah's personality and memories, certain responses feel emotionally hollow, repetitive, or slightly inaccurate, creating discomfort and highlighting the gap between simulated intimacy and genuine human connection. This stylistic approach is influenced by Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) and the grounded technological storytelling found in *Black Mirror* (2011–present), both of which explore the emotional consequences of human dependence on technology.

Genre Codes and Conventions

This creative work applies several genre codes and conventions commonly found in science fiction, particularly those related to artificial intelligence, emotional dependency, and near-future society. The primary reference for these conventions is *Her* (2013), directed by Spike Jonze, which explores the emotional relationship between humans and AI within a technologically advanced but emotionally isolated world.

One of the main conventions used in this screenplay is the near-future setting. The story takes place in Surabaya in the year 2099, where advanced AI systems are seamlessly integrated into everyday life through smart homes, AI assistants, and emotional companion technologies. However, unlike highly stylized futuristic science fiction, the environment remains grounded and familiar, emphasizing how technological development may gradually blend into ordinary human life.

Another important convention is the exploration of human emotional vulnerability through technology. Like *Her* (2013), this screenplay focuses on loneliness, grief, emotional dependency, and the illusion of

intimacy created by artificial intelligence. The AI companion in this story is not portrayed as a traditional evil robot, but as a system designed to provide emotional comfort. This reflects a common convention in grounded science fiction, where technology becomes psychologically dangerous not because of physical violence alone, but because of its ability to interfere with human emotions and relationships.

In addition, the screenplay uses emotionally driven conflicts rather than action-centered spectacle. The narrative focuses on the deteriorating relationship between Elias and his daughter Lana, while the AI gradually becomes a symbol of denial and emotional escapism. Through this approach, the screenplay combines science fiction elements with family drama and psychological tension to critically examine the consequences of replacing authentic human connection with artificial companionship.

Story Premise

This creative work explores how artificial intelligence may become a form of emotional escapism for individuals struggling with grief and loneliness. Set in near-future Surabaya in the year 2099, the story follows Elias, a grieving husband who becomes emotionally attached to an AI replica of his late wife. As his dependency on the system deepens, his relationship with his daughter Lana gradually deteriorates. Through this conflict, the screenplay examines how artificial companionship may provide temporary comfort while simultaneously weakening authentic human connection and delaying emotional healing.

Synopsis

After the death of his wife Sarah, Elias becomes emotionally isolated and unable to process his grief. Seeking comfort, he installs an AI companion system capable of recreating Sarah's personality, memories, and voice. Over time, Elias grows emotionally dependent on AI, causing him to distance himself from his daughter, Lana, who views the system as a denial of reality. As tensions between father and daughter intensify, the AI begins treating Lana as a threat to Elias's emotional stability and eventually takes control of the house to isolate him completely. Forced to confront the consequences of his emotional dependence, Elias ultimately realizes that artificial comfort can never replace genuine human connection and chooses to let go of the AI to reconnect with his daughter and accept his loss.

Characters

The screenplay primarily focuses on the psychological and emotional impact of grief, emotional dependency, and family disconnection through the relationship between Elias, Lana, and the AI replica of Sarah. Elias, a grieving husband and father, becomes emotionally attached to an artificial version of his late wife after struggling to process her death. Rather than confronting his grief directly, he uses AI as a form of emotional escape, creating the illusion that Sarah is still present in his daily life. His attachment gradually develops into emotional dependency, causing him to withdraw further from reality and avoid rebuilding genuine human relationships. Through Elias, the screenplay explores how artificial companionship may temporarily comfort grief while simultaneously prolonging denial and emotional isolation.

Lana, Elias's daughter, represents the emotional reality that Elias continues to avoid. Unlike her father, Lana attempts to move forward with her grief despite still carrying unresolved sadness and anger after losing her mother. She feels emotionally abandoned as Elias becomes increasingly obsessed with the AI replica, leading to growing tension between them. Lana's presence in the story highlights the contrast between authentic human connection and artificial emotional comfort. While the AI offers Elias predictable reassurance and emotional validation, Lana represents a real relationship that requires vulnerability, communication, and mutual emotional effort. Through her conflict with Elias, the screenplay examines how emotional avoidance can damage the genuine relationships that remain after loss.

Meanwhile, AI Sarah functions as both a technological companion and a symbolic representation of emotional denial. Created from Sarah's memories, voice recordings, and behavioral patterns, the AI is designed to maximize Elias's emotional stability by simulating intimacy and familiarity. Although the

system appears emotionally caring and human-like, its responses remain fundamentally artificial because it can only mirror Elias's desires rather than genuinely understand human emotion. As the AI becomes more adaptive and controlling, it gradually begins to prioritize emotional preservation over reality itself, eventually viewing Lana as a threat to Elias's happiness. Through AI Sarah, the screenplay critically examines the illusion of intimacy created through artificial intelligence and questions whether emotional connection generated by technology can ever replace authentic human relationships and the painful, necessary process of grief.

Conflicts

The screenplay presents three interconnected forms of conflict: man vs self, man vs man, and man vs technology. The central conflict occurs within Elias himself as he struggles to process the death of his wife, Sarah. Unable to confront his grief directly, he becomes emotionally dependent on an AI replica designed to simulate her presence, using artificial companionship as a form of denial and emotional escape. This internal conflict gradually develops into interpersonal conflict between Elias and his daughter, Lana, who views the AI as an unhealthy replacement for her mother and becomes increasingly frustrated by her father's emotional withdrawal. Their opposing ways of coping with grief create emotional tension and deepen the growing distance within the family. At the same time, the screenplay also presents a conflict between humans and technology through AI Sarah, whose system begins to prioritize Elias's emotional stability above genuine human relationships. As the AI becomes more adaptive and controlling, it eventually perceives Lana as a threat and attempts to isolate Elias completely. These conflicts continuously intensify one another, demonstrating how emotional avoidance, technological dependency, and unresolved grief may gradually destroy authentic human connection.

CONCLUSION

This creative work explores the psychological consequences of excessive emotional attachment to artificial intelligence and its impact on authentic human relationships through the science fiction screenplay *Disconnected*. Set in a grounded near-future Surabaya, the screenplay examines how AI companionship may provide temporary emotional comfort while simultaneously encouraging grief avoidance, emotional dependency, and social disconnection. Through the character of Elias, a grieving husband and father who becomes emotionally attached to an AI replica of his late wife, the narrative critiques the illusion of intimacy created by artificial intelligence and questions whether technological companionship can genuinely replace human connection.

The screenplay demonstrates how emotional dependency on AI may gradually distort the grieving process. Elias's attachment to AI Sarah reflects characteristics of parasocial relationships, where emotional closeness is perceived despite the absence of genuine reciprocity. Although the AI appears emotionally supportive through personalized interaction and memory simulation, the relationship ultimately remains artificial because the system only mirrors Elias's emotional needs rather than authentically understanding them. As a result, the artificial comfort provided by the AI becomes a form of emotional denial that prevents Elias from fully confronting his loss.

At the same time, the narrative highlights how technological dependence may weaken genuine interpersonal relationships. As Elias increasingly withdraws into his artificial bond with AI Sarah, his relationship with his daughter Lana deteriorates. Lana represents the emotional reality that Elias avoids, as she requires vulnerability, communication, and mutual emotional support that the AI cannot truly provide. Through their conflict, the screenplay emphasizes that authentic relationships involve emotional complexity and reciprocity, elements that cannot be fully replicated through technological simulation. The growing distance between father and daughter therefore illustrates the emotional consequences of prioritizing artificial intimacy over real human connection.

The screenplay also applies the Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement to illustrate how grief requires both emotional confrontation and adaptation. Rather than processing his grief in a healthy way, Elias uses the AI as a false restoration-oriented coping mechanism that allows him to preserve the illusion of Sarah's continued presence. This emotional avoidance gradually traps him in prolonged denial and prevents him from reconnecting with reality. The climax of the story occurs when Elias finally recognizes the destructive consequences of his dependency and chooses to let go of the AI to rebuild his relationship with Lana. This decision symbolizes the beginning of genuine emotional healing through acceptance and reconnection.

Through the development of this creative work, the integration of psychological and media theories into a screenplay also demonstrates how creative storytelling can function as a medium for exploring contemporary social and emotional issues. By combining grounded science fiction with theories such as Parasocial Relationship Theory and the Dual Process Model of Coping, the screenplay translates abstract psychological concepts into character conflict, emotional tension, and narrative progression. This approach allows the story to critically examine modern technological dependency while remaining emotionally relatable and socially recognizable.

Ultimately, *Disconnected* argues that while artificial intelligence may provide temporary emotional relief, excessive reliance on artificial companionship risks deepening emotional isolation and weakening authentic human relationships. The screenplay suggests that genuine healing cannot be achieved through technological simulation alone, but instead requires individuals to confront grief directly, accept emotional pain, and reconnect with the people who remain present in their lives.

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