

# ‘A form of acceptance’: TikTok’s new trend of ‘canon events’

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The universal human experience of regretfully pondering the things that could have been different in your life has had a TikTok makeover. Meet “canon events” –unfortunate periods that make you, you. The idea of canon events is central to the newly released animated movie, Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse, in which all the incarnations of Spiderman from parallel dimensions are bound together by several key (canon) events that must occur in each. They are unavoidable. And attempts to prevent them from happening – for example, not getting bitten by a radioactive spider or tragically losing a parental figure – could lead to the very fabric of time and space unravelling. Now the concept has transcended the realms of the Spider-Verse and become an extremely popular trend on TikTok and other video sharing apps. The format is simple enough: a few seconds of the poster’s face looking regretful with an ominous tone from the film’s soundtrack playing underneath. The text on screen describes how it feels to watch someone make a terrible or embarrassing decision, but are unable to do anything to interfere because it is a “canon event”. “Me watching every teenage girl getting into her first relationship with a medium ugly guy that bares a striking resemblance to the rat from flushed away. (I can not interfere, it is a canon event),” TikToker @bonnieaustinnnnnnnn (sic) writes. “When I have to watch someone accept a job that hired them on the spot and claims to be ‘a family’” @heystraights types over footage of them covering their mouth, pretending to weep. Videos using the hashtag #canonevent have now collectively accumulated more than 150m views on TikTok. The trend is clearly satirical but ultimately delivers quite an earnest philosophical message. That whatever is about to happen is either a harsh right of passage (like “watching my younger brother get a perm,”) or a difficult but essential life event that ultimately shaped the poster into who they are today (eg. “when I see the freshly out gay kid fall in love and obsess over just a really nice straight friend ... [it’s] crucial to the plot”). Dr Caroline Moul, a senior lecturer at the University of Sydney’s school of psychology, says the trend appears to be a way of publicly letting go of what “could have” or “should have” been. “In terms of dealing with a negative event, I think it is quite positive. It’s almost like a form of acceptance,” she says. But Moul was quick to add that the idea of giving over control to the universe isn’t necessarily always going to be healthy and healing, especially when applied to prospective rather than retrospective events. “If someone was saying ‘I fail my exams [is a canon event]’ then they are kind of giving themselves this attribution that that’s just what they do. They just fail exams. It’s almost like you’re saying, ‘I’m helpless in this. I’ve got no autonomy’,” she says. “If you’re talking about future things or current decisions, then you’re almost using it as an excuse to take away your decision making .” Moul points out that the idea behind “canon events” is by no means new, and agrees it has some similarities to the religious practice of viewing negative and difficult-to-understand events

as “part of God’s plan”. “It’s a higher order of organisation. Whether it’s in the framework of religion or philosophy or parallel universes, those themes go across all three.”