

The Global Destruction of Human Capital

And what legislatures can do to reverse it



Jonathan Haidt
NYU-Stern

Dutch Parliamentary Committee of
Health, Welfare and Sport

Oct. 29, 2024

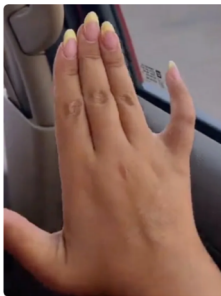


NEW YORK POST

TikTokers panic over viral 'phone pinky' deformities: 'We all got it'

Deirdre Bardolf
August 24, 2024 · 3 min read

18



TikToker showing hand with severely bent pinky, her long nails fit in the crook of her bent pinky, bottom right showing pinky f

© Twitter

DukeHealth Find a Doctor Treatments Locations Patients & Visitors

How your smartphone is hurting you

April 19, 2016

Share



smartphones can cause pain in your neck and elsewhere

The New York Times

Text Neck, Pinkie Pain and Other Ways Phones Can Wreck Our Bodies

Health providers say they are seeing more patients than ever with pain and joint ailments in their hands, necks, shoulders and upper backs — and that mobile phones are most likely playing a part.

Children's myopia risk linked to smartphone use, study says

JUNE 15, 2020

Researchers found an association between myopia and prolonged smartphone use, begging the question: What does the future hold for millions of kids growing up in the digital age?



Myopic children use twice as much smartphone data each day as their non-myopic peers, a recent study found, leading researchers to ponder whether IGI's unparalleled connectivity from such a young age exacerbates myopia risk.

The Economist

Short-sightedness has become an epidemic

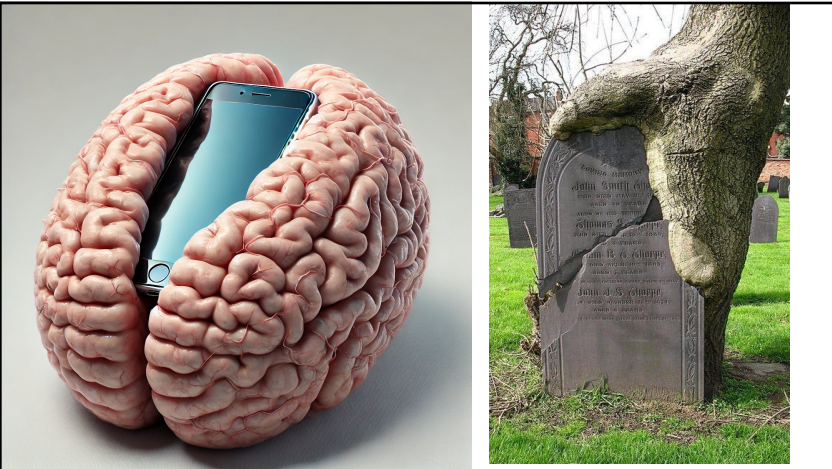
To fight it, schools should send their students outside



Jun 9th 2022

Share

The evidence suggests that regular exposure to bright daylight is vital in properly controlling the growth of children's eyes. Too little light leads to elongated, short-sighted eyes.



The Anxious Generation

How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness

Jonathan Haidt

Cocreator of *The Coddling of the American Mind*

The Great Rewiring of Childhood:

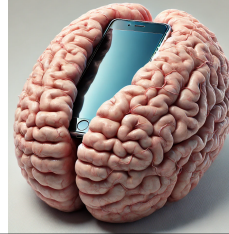
Act 1: The play-based childhood faded out gradually, 1980-2010

Act 2: The phone-based childhood stormed in with the iPhone, social media, front-facing camera and high-speed internet, 2010-2015

We have overprotected our children in the real world and underprotected them online.

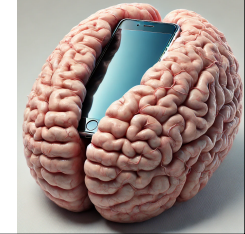
The Global Destruction of Human Capital And Human Potential Since 2012

1. **Physical deformities: bent pinkies and elongated eyeballs**
2. Educational declines: global since 2012
3. Happiness declines: global, but only among young adults
4. Mental illness increases: across the West
5. Suicide increases
Interlude: Why is this happening?
6. The loss of young men
7. Declines in ambition, risk-taking, and creativity
8. Declines in social capital
9. Declines in the "arts of association" necessary for democracy



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The Atlantic

DECEMBER 19, 2023

It Sure Looks Like Phones Are Making Students Dumber

Test scores have been falling for years—even before the pandemic.

By Derek Thompson

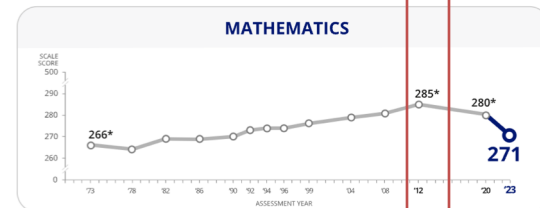


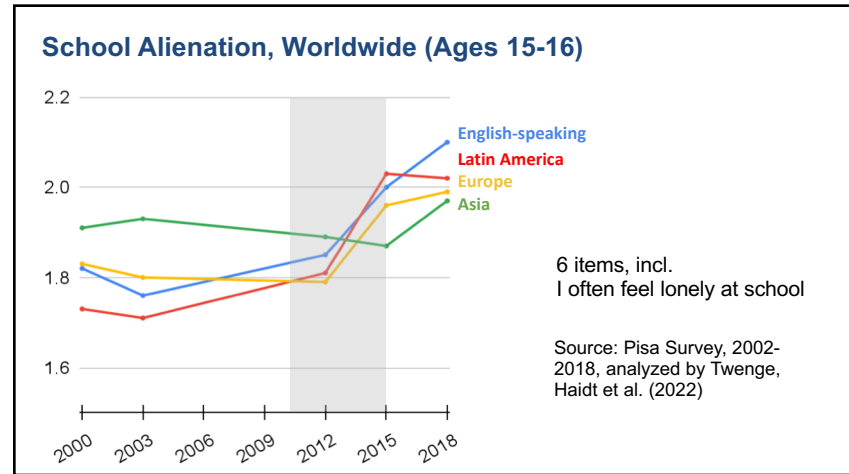
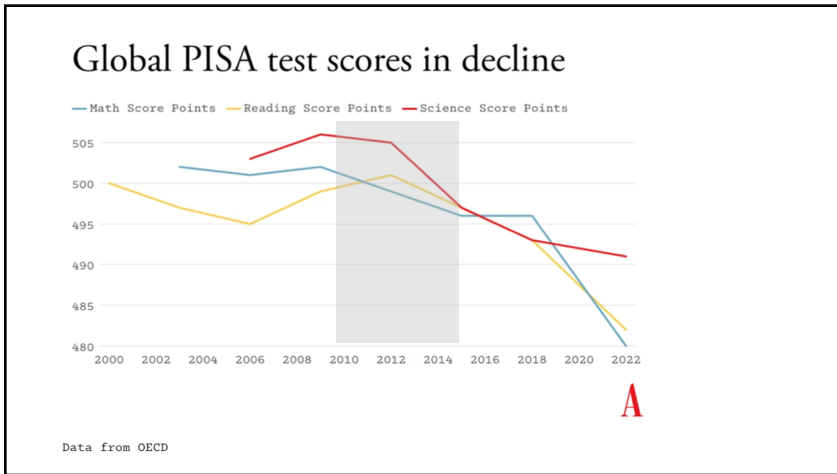
The Nation's Report Card REPOR NAEP Long-Term Trend

Yes, COVID mattered.

But an unprecedented reversal began in 2012.

We are most of the way back to 1971





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The Economist Dec. 2010

Christmas Specials | Age and happiness

The U-bend of life

Why, beyond middle age, people get happier as they get older

The U-bend

Self-reported well-being, on a scale of 1-10

Age, years	Well-being (1-10)
18-21	6.8
26-29	6.5
34-37	6.5
42-46	6.4
50-53	6.4
58-61	6.6
66-69	6.8
74-77	6.9
82-85	7.0

Source: PNAS paper: “A snapshot of the age distribution of psychological well-being in the United States” by Arthur Stone

The Economist


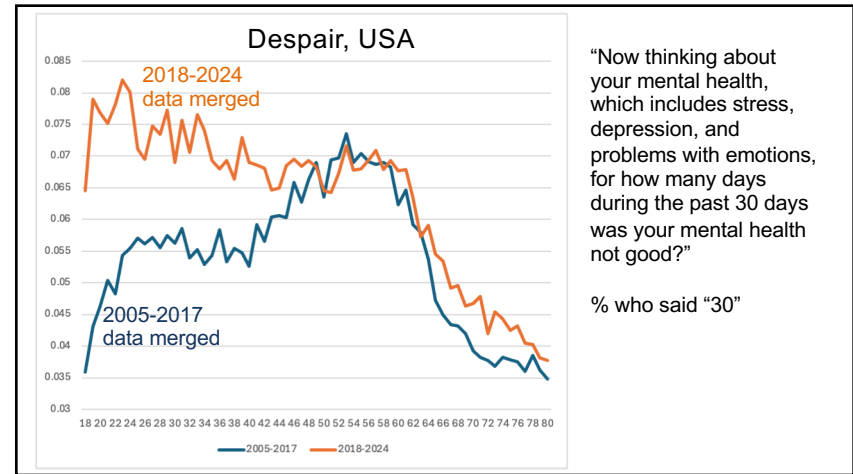
2024:
Economist David Blanchflower
Discovers that.....

JULY 12, 2024 | 9 MIN READ

Young Adulthood Is No Longer One of Life's Happiest Times

The U-shaped curve that pegged youth and old age as the happiest times of life has changed

BY DEENA MOUSA

"Now thinking about your mental health, which includes stress, depression, and problems with emotions, for how many days during the past 30 days was your mental health not good?"

% who said "30"

The Declining Mental Health Of The Young And The Global Disappearance Of The Hump Shape In Age In Unhappiness

NBER | NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH

David G. Blanchflower, Alex Bryson & Xiaowei Xu

After Babel

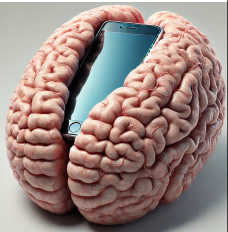
The Global Loss of the U-Shaped Curve of Happiness

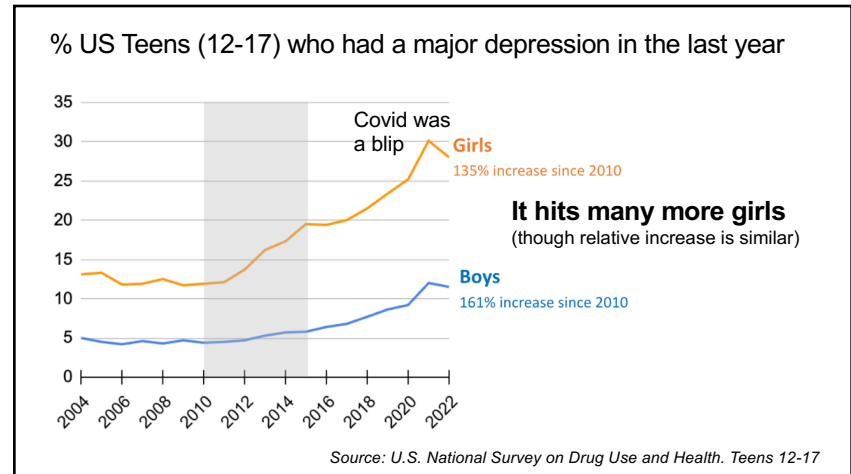
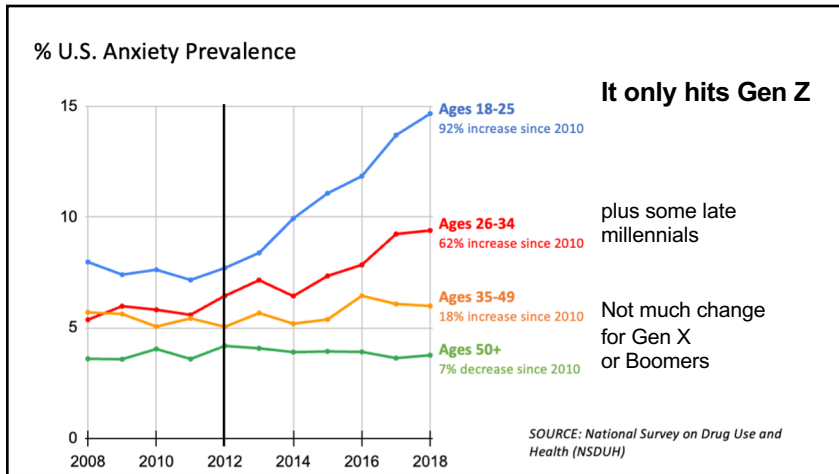
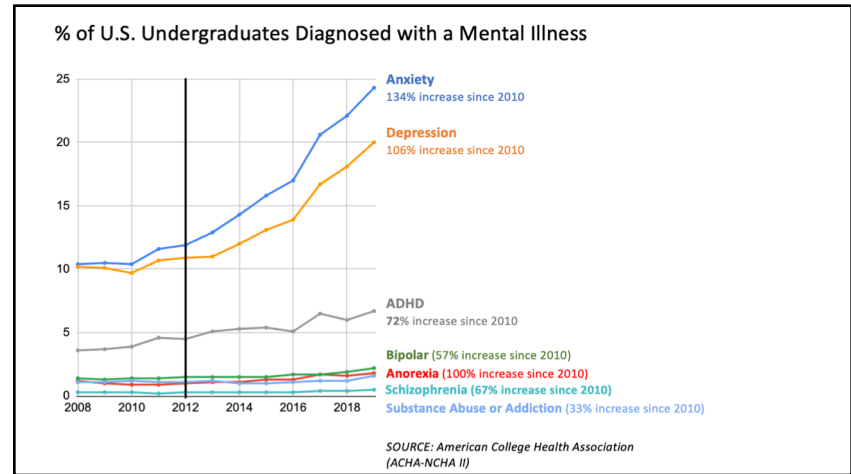
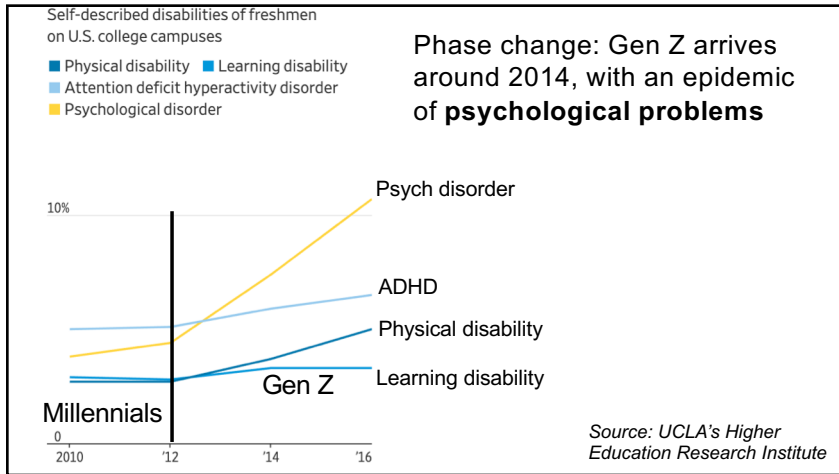
Happiness used to be U-shaped by age, with middle age the least happy. Not anymore. Young people are now the least happy.

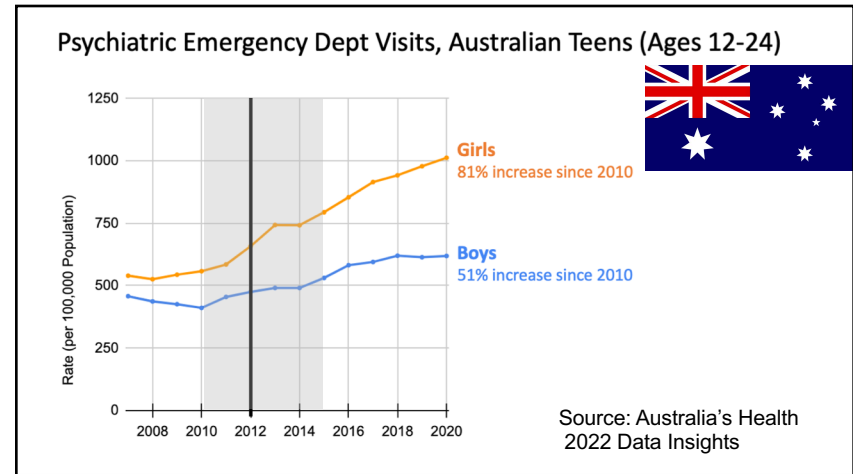
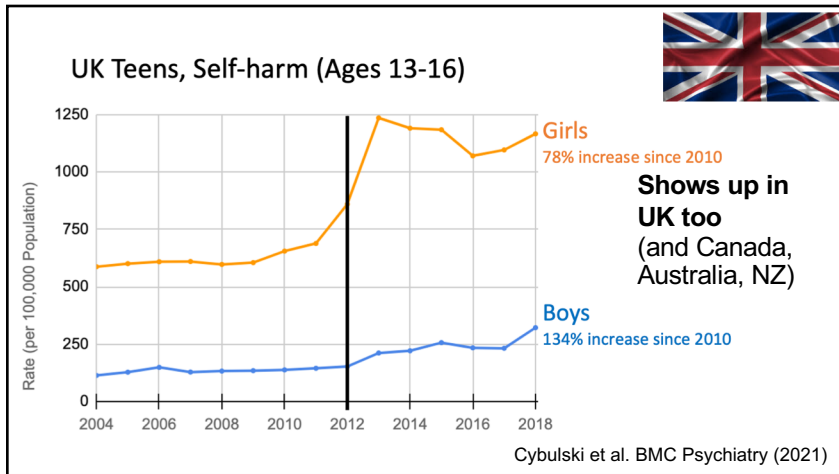
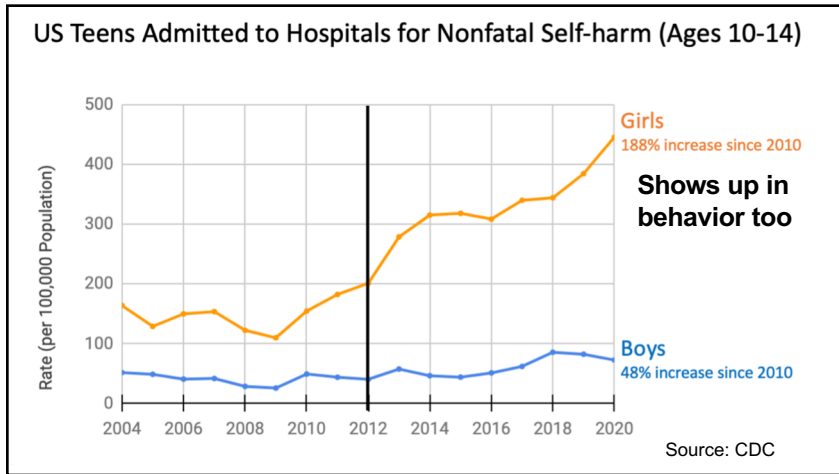
DAVID BLANCHFLOWER AND ALEX BRYSON
MAY 27, 2024

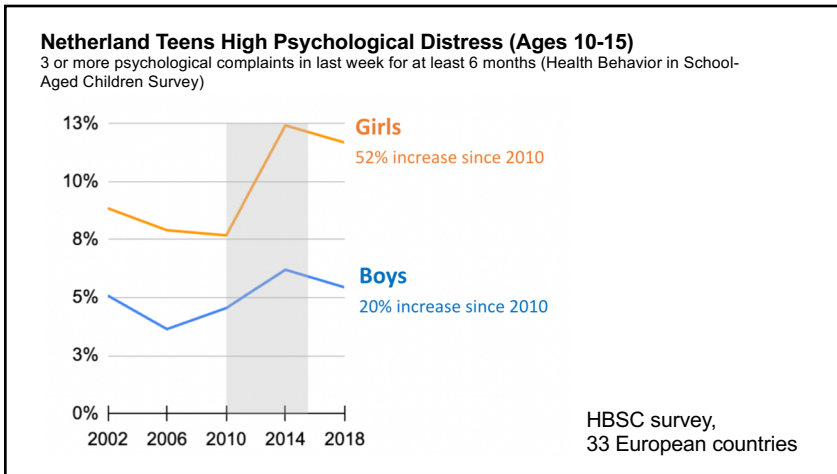
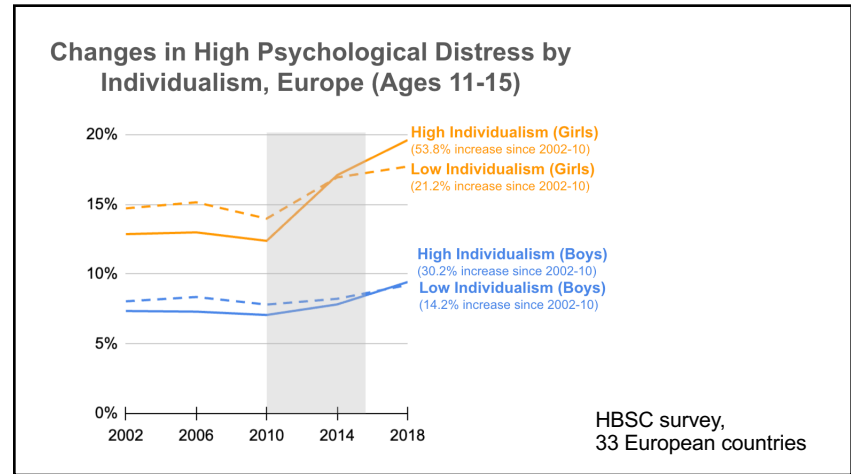
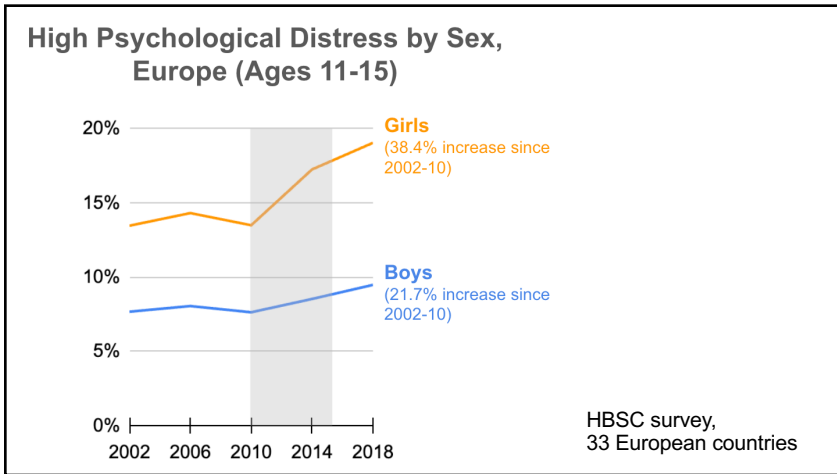
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HEALTH

Benefits data reveals extent of claims over mental health

Official figures highlight the growing toll of Britain's long-term sickness crisis

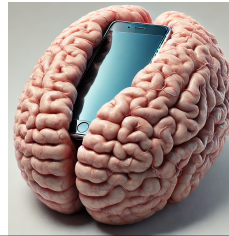
THE SUNDAY TIMES

March 14, 2024

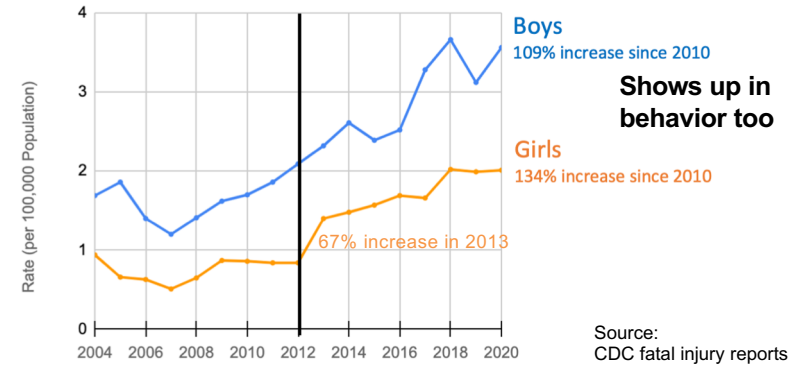
Among under-35s, mental health conditions are now far and away the most common work-limiting condition, a dramatic change from a decade ago, when back and joint problems were top. Almost a quarter of those aged 17 to 19 now report a probable mental health disorder and the potential costs of a generation with so many struggling to work are daunting.

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US Teens, Suicides (Ages 10 – 14)



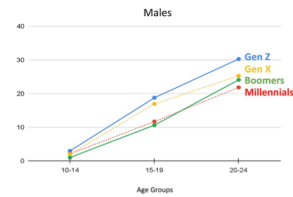
After Babel

Suicide Rates Are up for Gen Z Across the Anglosphere, Especially for Girls

It's not just anxiety, depression, and self-harm. (Part 3 of Youth Mental Health Crisis is International)

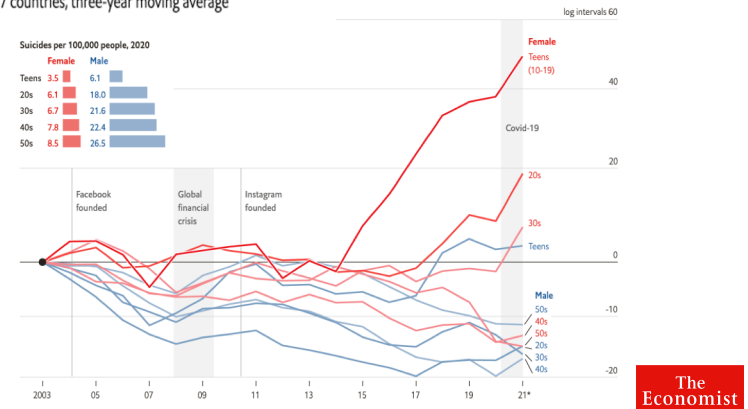
ZACH RAUSCH AND JON HAIDT
OCT 30, 2023

Suicide Rates by Age Groups and Generations (U.S.)



Suicide rate, % change since 2003, by age and sex 17 countries, three-year moving average

A global decline in suicide?

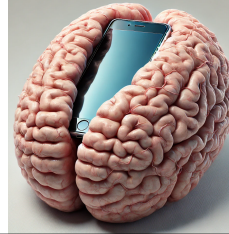


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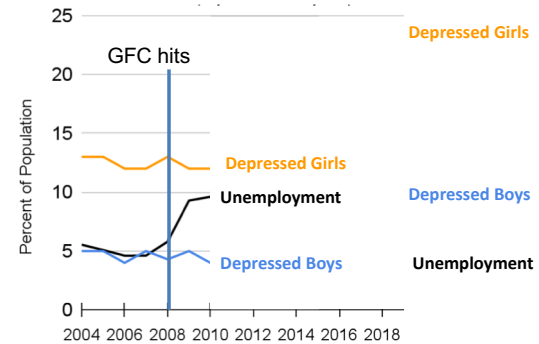
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It Aint the Global Financial Crisis:

% of US Teens with Major Depression, vs. Unemployment Rate



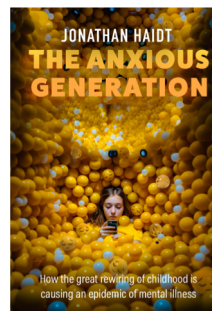
SOURCE: NSDUH and US Bureau of Labor Statistics

Only one theory can explain why it happened internationally, beginning around 2012

The Great Rewiring of Childhood:

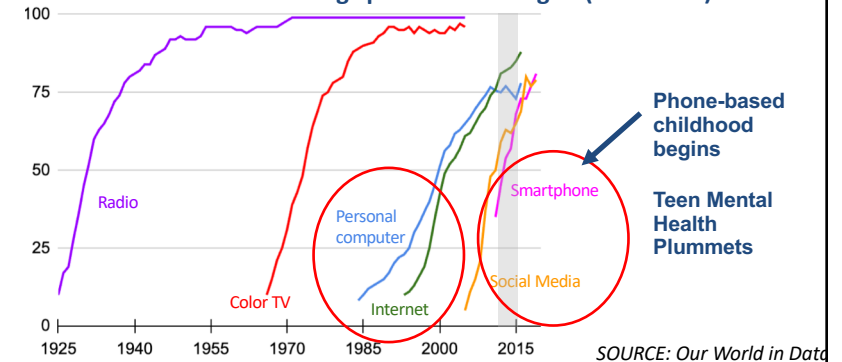
Act 1: The End of Play-Based Childhood (1980-2010)

Act 2: The Birth of Phone-Based Childhood (2010-2015)



The Internet Came in Two Waves. The First was Amazing

Share of U.S. Households Using Specific Technologies (1925-2019)



SOURCE: Our World in Data

The great rewiring of childhood: 2010-2015



to



A tool for connecting with friends and family:

- No front-facing camera
- No internet
- No Instagram
- You pay for texts

A portal by which companies and strangers can get to you

- Front-facing camera
- High speed internet, Instagram, etc
- Unlimited data and texts
- Unlimited interruptions

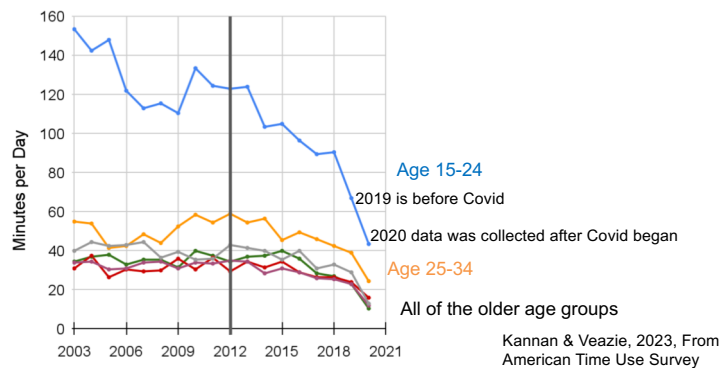
The great rewiring of childhood: 2010-2015



to



Daily average time with friends (minutes)



Four Foundational Harms (ch. 5)

all caused by the phone-based childhood

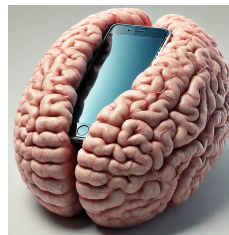
1. Social deprivation (Time with friends down 65% since 2010)
2. Sleep deprivation (up since 2013)
3. Attention fragmentation (inability to stay on task)
4. Behavioral Addiction (2-10%)

Additional Harms to Girls (ch. 6)

1. Visual Social comparison (Instagram is the worst)
2. Perfectionism
3. Relational Aggression
4. Girls share emotions, more than boys
5. Girls are more susceptible to "sociogenic" transmission (TikTok is the worst, e.g, TikTok Tourette's syndrome)
6. Girls are more subject to sexual predation and harassment

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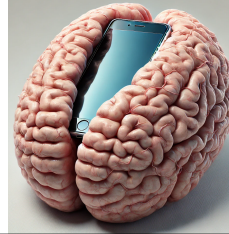
Additional Harms to Boys (ch. 7)

1. They have been retreating from the "real world" since the 1970s
2. The virtual world welcomes them (Ulysses and the sirens)
3. Porn addiction, loss of drive and skill to talk to girls, warping of ideas about girls, women, and sex
4. Multiplayer videogames are amazing, addictive, and isolating
5. Boys addicted to dopamine hits become irritable and unhappy when not online. Withdraw from family and school

BOYS ARE FAILING TO DO THINGS THAT WOULD TURN THEM INTO MEN
Risk is especially valuable for boys!

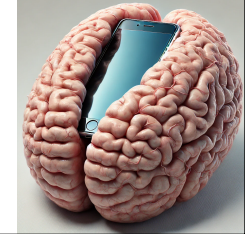
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Sohn 2023 | Patrick Collison in conversation Sam Altman

Collison: When we first met, 15 or so years ago, Mark Zuckerberg was preeminent in the technology industry and in his 20s. And not that long before then Marc Andreessen was preeminent in the industry and in his 20s. And not that long before then, Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, and so forth. For most of the history of the software sector, one of the top three people has been in their 20s. It doesn't seem that that's true to me today.



Sohn 2023 | Patrick Collison in conversation Sam Altman

Altman: I'm obsessed with this problem. It's not good. Something has really gone wrong... where are the great founders in their 20s? I hope we'll see a bunch, I hope this was just a weird accident of history, but **maybe something has really gone wrong in our educational system or our society**

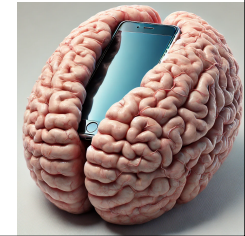
Name 3 people under 29 who have made a big impact on the world, or produced something great?
[leave aside athletes and musicians]



Any young men?
Any Americans?

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Are the correlations too small to matter?



“Hundreds of researchers, myself included, have searched for the kind of **large effects** suggested by Haidt. Our efforts have produced a mix of no, small and mixed associations.”
--Candice Odgers, UC-Irvine

“99.75% of a person's life satisfaction has nothing to do with their use of social media,”
--Andrew Przybylski, Oxford Internet Institute



But: The “skeptics” all make three conceptual errors

- 1) *The skeptics operationalize all the things that happen on social media as one single crude number: Time spent. It picks up only a little of the action. Then they say that the correlations are too small to matter*
- 2) *The skeptics all conduct “blender studies.” When Twenge and I unblend them, we find much larger correlations for A) social-media-time, B) for girls, C) looking at anxiety/depression as outcome.*
- 3) *The skeptics confuse the variance explained in a dataset with the variance explained in the world.*

”Correlation doesn’t imply causation”

Yes but experiments using random assignment do. There is one narrow class of experiments that ask individuals to reduce social media. Most of those that go on for more than a week find benefits. [see AfterBabel.com]

The Fundamental Flaws of The Only Meta-Analysis of Social Media Reduction Experiments (And Why It Matters), Part 1

A recent meta-analysis contains yet overlooks evidence that multi-week social media reduction experiments consistently improve mental health



ZACH RAUSCH AND JON HAIDT
AUG 29, 2024

”Correlation doesn’t imply causation”

Yes but eyewitness testimony from teens and from frontline psychiatric workers does imply causality.



Let Them Be Kids: Young Aussies’ eating disorders fuelled by social media, poll shows

”Correlation doesn’t imply causation”

Yes but leaks and whistleblowers within the companies tell us directly that they know they are harming teens at an industrial scale



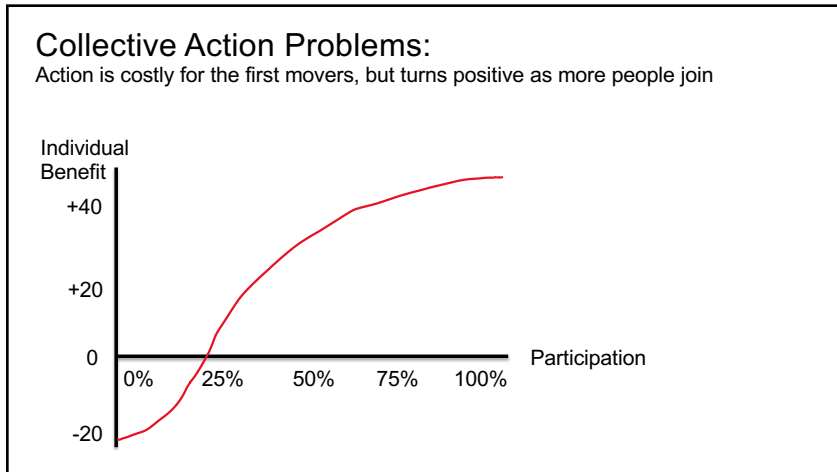
Snapchat Lawsuit Reveals Company's Sextortion Worries

Published Oct 02, 2024 at 5:08 AM EDT | Updated Oct 02, 2024 at 10:41 PM EDT

What should legislators do now?
How can we roll back the phone based childhood?

Four simple norms to break collective action problems

1. No Smartphones Before High School (Age 14)
2. No Social Media Before 16
3. Phone Free Schools
4. Much more childhood independence and free play



Norm #1: No smartphone before high school

Only give a flip phone or phone watch

Don't give an iPad either, though you can let them use the family iPad, with limits

It's been so nice getting to interact with you for these past six years. Here's your first device

Norm #2: No social media before 16

Let them get through early puberty first!

They have many other ways of connecting.

Nov 9, 2017 - Technology

Sean Parker unloads on Facebook: "God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains"

Mike Aizen, author of *Autism AM*

Reuters: Florida's DeSantis signs law restricting social media for people under 16

AP: Australia proposes legal minimum age for children accessing social media

BY ROD MCGUIRK
Updated 5:50 AM EDT, September 10, 2024

Norm #3: Phone Free Schools

If anyone is texting/posting during class, they all have to check, to keep up.

Help teachers to get your child's attention

Next we'll tackle the iPads and Chromebooks....

Norm #4: Far more independence, free play, and responsibility in the real world (see LetGrow.org)

Visit AnxiousGeneration.com


Then "Take Action"

Actions for ...

- Parents
- Educators
- Gen Z
- Legislators
- Everyone

Actions for Legislators


State and federal governments can take the lead in supporting the four new norms that will roll back the phone-based childhood, restore more free play and independence, and improve mental health.



Keep Up with the Latest Legislation

Keep up with the ongoing legislative efforts to reform social media through our [open-source collaborative review Google Doc](#) and the [Integrity Institute's Policy tracker](#). For a preview on the role of government to help solve this collective action problem, read this [post on our Substack](#).

[Learn More](#)



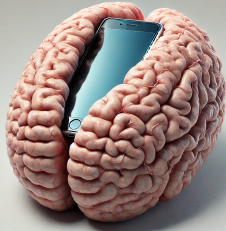
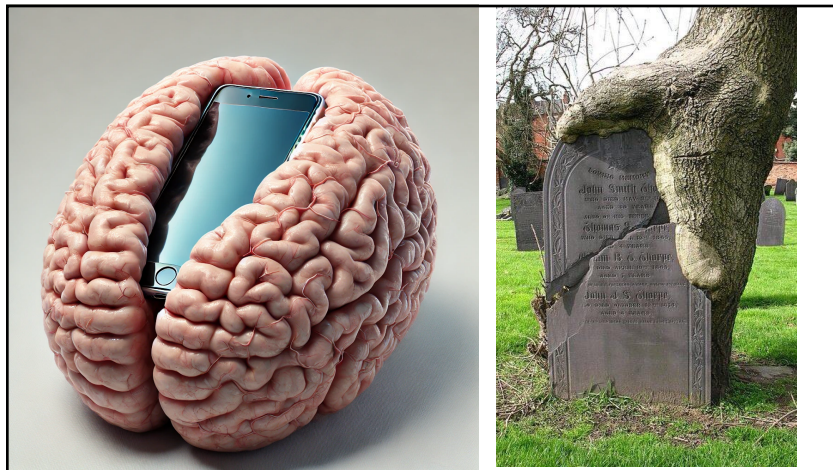
Guidesheet for Policy Makers

Nine proposed solutions to help remedy social media platforms for teens. The guide sheet includes a mix of easily-implementable narrow proposals and more far-reaching broad solutions.

[Learn More](#)

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The Global Destruction of Human Capital *And what legislatures can do to reverse it*



Jonathan Haidt
NYU-Stern

Dutch Parliamentary Committee of
Health, Welfare and Sport

Oct. 29, 2024