What’s going wrong for Gen Z, and how can K-12 education can set them up for success?

Jonathan Haidt, NYU-Stern
National Summit on Education Reform
Nov. 20, 2019
Complaints about the next gen are eternal:

“Worse than our grandparents’ generation, our parents then produced us, even worse, and soon to bear still more sinful children.”

--Horace, Odes, Book III:VI, circa 20 BCE
1) The mental health crisis of Gen Z

2) Cause #1: Social media

3) Cause #2: Overprotecting antifragile kids

4) Educate for wisdom, strength, and independence
1) The mental health crisis of Gen Z

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4) Educate for wisdom, strength, and independence
Gen-Z (born 1996+) has less “life experience”

% of 12th graders who...
- Ever date
- Work for pay
- Have tried alcohol
- Have Drivers License

Source: Monitoring the Future Study, 1976-2016. (Twenge, 2017, fig. 1.13)
Self-described disabilities of freshmen on U.S. college campuses

- Physical disability
- Learning disability
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- Psychological disorder

… and an epidemic of psychological problems

Source: UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute
Students Flood College Mental-Health Centers

Colleges from Ohio State to Central Florida devise more programs to triage students; determining who needs therapy and who may be fine with some peer counseling.

At Ohio State University, Tyler Hackmann, a graduate student, and Shiana Bookless, a junior, are peer counselors in the university’s wellness-coaching program. They counsel students who seek help for adjustment issues. PHOTO: MADIE MC SARVEY FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
% of US Teens who had a major depression in the last year

Source: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health
US undergraduates, severe depression rate

Source: Healthy Minds Study, % scoring 15 or above on the PHQ-9
Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?

Parents, therapists and schools are struggling to figure out whether helping anxious teenagers means protecting them or pushing them to face their fears.

By BENoit DENIZET-LEWIS OCT. 11, 2017
The Big Myth About Teenage Anxiety

Relax: The digital age is not wrecking your kid's brain.

By Richard A. Friedman
Dr. Friedman is a psychiatrist.

Sept. 7, 2018
Anxiety
Depression
Relationship problem
Stress

NOTHING else is rising. Not even "stress"
Hospital Admissions for non-fatal self-harm: Girls

Age 15-19
Age 20-24
Age 10-14

Source: Mercado, Holland, Leemis, Stone, & Wang (2017), JAMA
Hospital Admissions for non-fatal self-harm: Girls

Age 15-19 (+62% since 2009)
Age 20-24 (+17%)
Age 10-14 (+189%)

Source: Mercado, Holland, Leemis, Stone, & Wang (2017), JAMA
Suicide rates in girls are rising, study finds, especially in those age 10 to 14

Girls’ rate is up 151% compared to 2001-2010

By Dr. Edith Bracho-Sanchez, CNN

Updated 11:00 AM ET, Fri May 17, 2019
Hospital admissions for self-harm are up by two-thirds among girls

Self-harm by girls, up 55%

Boys: slight increase

Morgan et al., BMJ, 2017
WHY?

Why is this happening
- At the same time
- In multiple countries
- Bigger impact on girls
- Biggest impact on pre-teen girls
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Social Media Explains the Timing

% of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders using social networking sites almost every day.


2006: FB opens to all
2007: iPhone
2009: FB adds “Like” button; Twitter adds “retweet”; SM becomes more addictive and toxic
2009-2011: Migration of teen social life onto social media in USA
% of US Teens who had a major depression in the last year

Source: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health
The Dark Psychology of Social Networks

Why it feels like everything is going haywire

Story by Jonathan Haidt and Tobias Rose-Stockwell
Social Media Also Explains the Sex Difference

1. Girls use it more than boys. (Boys are gaming)
2. Girls are more affected by constant social comparison
3. Girls are more affected by FOMO and FOBLO
4. Girls’ aggression/bullying is relational, boys is more physical
My read of the state of the debate:

1) **Correlational studies** consistently show that heavy users are more depressed.

2) **BUT:** hours-of-use explains only a small portion of the variance in mental health outcomes.

3) **Experimental studies** mostly show that reducing social media time improves well-being.

4) Studies of **network effects** show that depression is very contagious, moreso than happiness, esp. from girls. So, when teens hyperconnected around 2011...
% of US Teens who had a major depression in the last year

Source: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health
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The Three Great Untruths

1. What doesn’t kill you makes you weaker

2. Always trust your feelings

3. Life is a battle between good people and evil people
Psych Principle: People are Anti-Fragile

*What doesn’t kill me makes me stronger.*

*(Friedrich Nietzsche, 1888)*
Systems that increase in capability, resilience, or robustness as a result of mistakes, faults, attacks, or failures.

"The resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better."

Examples:
--Bones
--The immune system
--Children
Why are peanut allergies on the rise?

By Susannah Locke | @susannahlocke | Nov 6, 2014, 3:10pm EST
Randomized Trial of Peanut Consumption in Infants at Risk for Peanut Allergy

Mary Feeney, M.Sc., R.D., Victor Turcanu, M.D., Ph.D., Michelle L. Sever, M.S.P.H., Ph.D., et al., for
Randomly assigned 640 high risk infants (eczema or egg allergies) to consume or avoid peanuts until age 5

Results: 17% of avoiders developed peanut allergies.

Only 3% of the consumers developed an allergy.

HOW GOOD INTENTIONS AND BAD IDEAS ARE SETTING UP A GENERATION FOR FAILURE
At what age were you let out?
--Allowed to walk ALONE, a quarter mile, to a store or friend’s house?
--Allowed to roam around town with friends, no adult supervision?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1st grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>7th grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>9th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>11th grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Born before 1982 (Gen X, Boomers…)

Born after 1995 (Gen Z)
Oh The Places You Won't Go!
The Playdates of Huckleberry Finn
Harold and the Purple Sofa
Encyclopedia Brown Solves the Worksheet
Dora in the Ford Explorer
The Decline of Play and the Rise of Psychopathology in Children and Adolescents

Peter Gray

2011, American Journal of Play
“Play functions as the major means by which children
(1) develop **intrinsic interests** and competencies;
(2) **learn how to make decisions, solve problems,**
    exert self-control, and follow rules;
(3) learn to **regulate their emotions**;
(4) **make friends** and learn to get along with others
    as equals; and
(5) **experience joy.**
Through all of these effects, **play promotes mental health.**”
Should We Let Toddlers Play With Saws and Knives?

By shielding children from every possible risk, we may lead them to react with exaggerated fear. New research on how youngsters learn across different cultures.

Also: handling risk
Gopnik: “trying to eliminate all such risks from children’s lives might be dangerous. There may be a psychological analog to the “hygiene hypothesis” proposed to explain the dramatic recent increase in allergies...

In the same way, by shielding children from every possible risk, we may lead them to react with exaggerated fear to situations that aren’t risky at all and isolate them from the adult skills that they will one day have to master.”
Too Dangerous
Just Right?
Prepare the child for the road, not the road for the child
In Britain’s Playgrounds, ‘Bringing in Risk’ to Build Resilience

By ELLEN BARRY   MARCH 10, 2018
University Bans Snowball Fights and Water Guns

The endless quest for ‘safe spaces’ on campus hits a ridiculous new low.

Delaware State University has announced that it is banning snowball fights, water guns, super soakers, and most masks that cover the face out of concern that they could present “potential harm” to students.
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4) Educate for wisdom, strength, and independence
The river of information: What comes into teens’ eyes and ears?
The river of information: What comes into teens’ eyes and ears?

**New info**
--Less than a week old

**Middle-aged info**
--10-50 years
--Parents and grandparents

**Classic info**
--more than 100 years
--Cultural inheritance

1890s
The river of information: What comes into teens’ eyes and ears?

**New info**
--Less than a week old
--Mostly adult-created

**Middle-aged info**
--10-50 years
--Parents and grandparents

**Classic info**
--more than 100 years
--Cultural inheritance

1960s
The river of information: What comes into teens’ eyes and ears?

**New info**
--Less than a week old
--Mostly *peer created*

**Middle-aged info**
--10-50 years
--Parents and grandparents

**Classic info**
--more than 100 years
--Cultural inheritance

2010s
Wisdom Deprivation Disorder?

New info
--Less than a week old
--Mostly peer created

Middle-aged info
--10-50 years
--Parents and grandparents

“We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages.” Edmund Burke (1790)
Educate for wisdom (and reduced depression/anxiety):

1) **Schools should ban devices during the school day** [and do research to assess effectiveness]

2) **Urge parents and kids to delay social media until high school.** Get it out of the lives of middle schoolers. Help parents by proposing norms.
3) Emphasize viewpoint diversity as a tonic for antifragile minds

“Learning is the antithesis of comfort... The collision of views and ideologies is in the DNA of the academic enterprise. We do not need any collision avoidance technology here.”

--Ruth Simmons, Pres. Brown U
Visit HeterodoxAcademy.org/mill
For a free student-friendly PDF of Ch. 2
Educate for wisdom and diversity: train students to speak and learn from those who differ

4) Use OpenMind
Content Overview

1. **Why talk to people you disagree with:**
   Discover how talking to people you disagree with can help you make wiser decisions and new discoveries.

2. **Cultivate intellectual humility:**
   Learn how cultivating a mindset of humility and open-mindedness can help you achieve academic, professional, and personal success.

3. **Explore the irrational mind:**
   Learn a little bit of psychology to see the tricks the mind plays on us, making us all prone to be self-righteous, overconfident, and quick to demonize "the other side."

4. **Break free from your moral matrix:**
   Uncover the power of the "moral matrix," which helps explain where our differences come from and why disagreements can be so intractable.

5. **Prepare for constructive disagreement:**
   Learn practical skills to turn the most difficult disagreements into productive conversations.

Visit OpenMindPlatform.org
Educate for strength and independence
5) Give kids far more free play time, with less supervision. Visit LetGrow.org for ideas and evidence, e.g.

More recess (without device access)

Keep playgrounds open before and after school
Educate for strength and independence

6) Pass free-range parenting laws in all 50 states!

Policy Information Package

Let Grow is working to ensure that parents who give their kids some reasonable independence are not treated as criminals. Here is the model law we are working to get passed.
1) The mental health crisis of Gen Z

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4) Educate for wisdom, strength, and independence
Educate for wisdom, strength, and independence

1) Ban devices during school day
2) Discourage getting social media before high school
3) Emphasize viewpoint diversity (see HeterodoxAcademy.org)
4) Train students to talk across divides (see OpenMindPlatform.org)
5) Give more free play time, with less supervision (see LetGrow.org)
6) Pass free-range parenting laws in all 50 states
What’s going wrong for Gen Z, and how can K-12 education can set them up for success?

Jonathan Haidt, NYU-Stern
National Summit on Education Reform
Nov. 20, 2019
To learn more, visit TheCoddling.com then “Solutions” “Better Mental Health”

1) Is there a mental health crisis among American and British teenagers? In chapter 7 we asserted that there is, and we showed graphs of rising depression and suicide rates for American teens. But some skeptics claim that self-report measures (of depression and anxiety) are unreliable, and that the suicide statistics are more complicated than it seems from our Figure 7.2. Please see this Google Doc, where Jon has laid out the various kinds of evidence, along with critiques from skeptics. If you are a researcher, please request access to the doc and add your comments.

2) Is there evidence that social media contributes to anxiety and depression, particularly among teen girls? On p. 159 we asserted that "the rise in adolescent mental illness is very large and is found in multiple datasets, but the percentage of that rise that can be attributed to smartphones and screen time is small, and the evidence is more indirect." We also wrote that:
Successful people embrace antifragility, not safetyism

Demosthenes: Overcame his "inarticulate and stammering pronunciation" by training with pebbles in his mouth, and by speaking after running sprints.

Olympic athletes train at high altitudes, to excel at lower altitudes.
Successful people embrace antifragility, not safetyism

Most top universities train students at low altitude, so they will find the “real world” more painful.

KATHERINE BYRON, a senior at Brown University and a member of its Sexual Assault Task Force, considers it her duty to make Brown a safe place for rape victims, free from anything that might prompt memories of trauma.

So when she heard last fall that a student group had organized a debate about campus sexual assault between Jessica Valenti, the founder of feministing.com, and Wendy McElroy, a libertarian, and that Ms. McElroy was likely to criticize the term “rape culture,” Ms. Byron was
Taleb’s advice to college students:

“You want to be the fire and wish for the wind.”
I don’t want you to be safe ideologically. I don’t want you to be safe emotionally. I want you to be strong. That’s different. I’m not going to pave the jungle for you. Put on some boots, and learn how to deal with adversity. I’m not going to take all the weights out of the gym; that’s the whole point of the gym. **This is the gym.**
Depression scores are strongly correlated with such scores in one’s friends and neighbors. This association extended up to three degrees of separation (to one’s friends’ friends’ friends). Female friends appear to be especially influential in the spread of depression from one person to another.