

# THE ANXIOUS GENERATION

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**HOW THE GREAT REWIRING  
OF CHILDHOOD IS CAUSING AN  
EPIDEMIC OF MENTAL ILLNESS**

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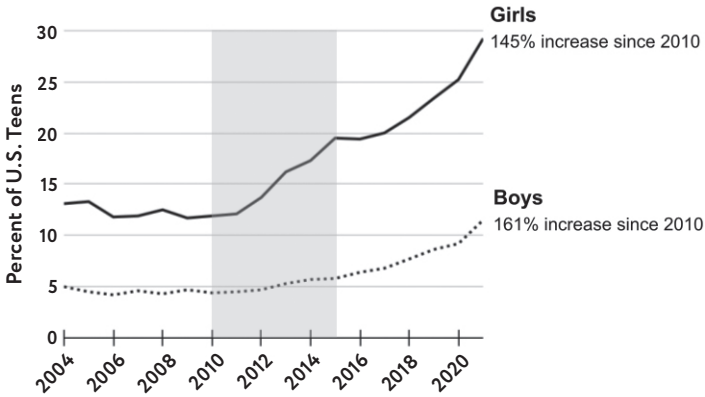
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**JONATHAN HAIDT**

**SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES**

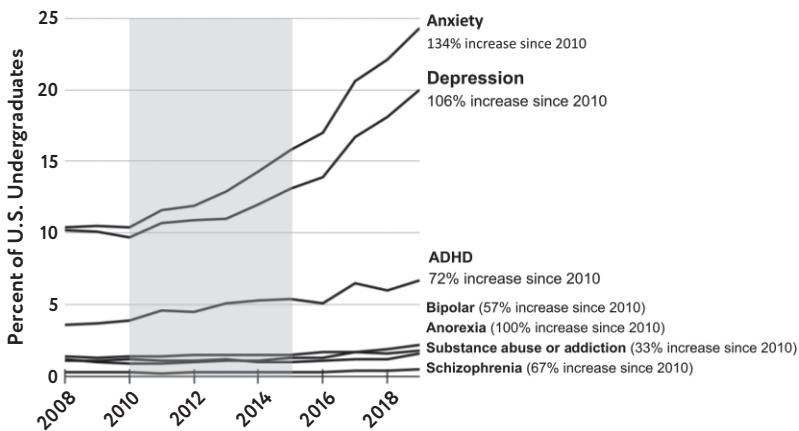
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## Major Depression Among Teens



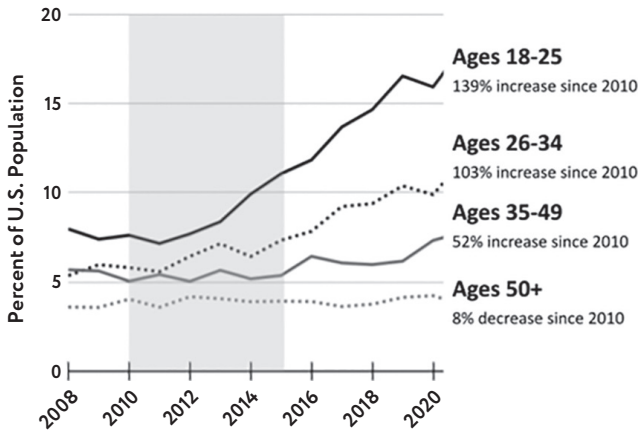
**Figure 1.1.** Percent of U.S. teens (ages 12–17) who had at least one major depressive episode in the past year, by self-report based on a symptom checklist. This was figure 7.1 in *The Coddling of the American Mind*, now updated with data beyond 2016. (Source: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health.)<sup>3</sup>

## Mental Illness Among College Students



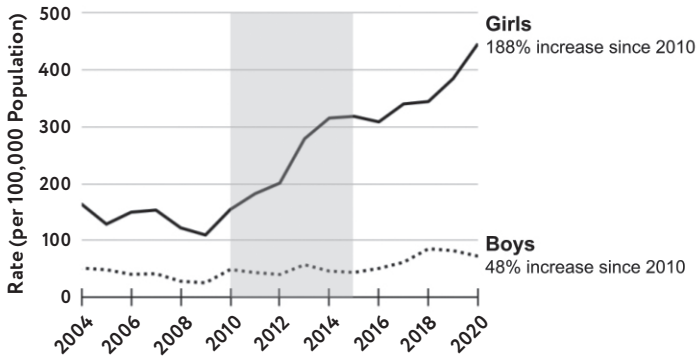
**Figure 1.2.** Percent of U.S. undergraduates with each of several mental illnesses. Rates of diagnosis of various mental illnesses increased in the 2010s among college students, especially for anxiety and depression. (Source: American College Health Association.)<sup>9</sup>

## Anxiety Prevalence by Age



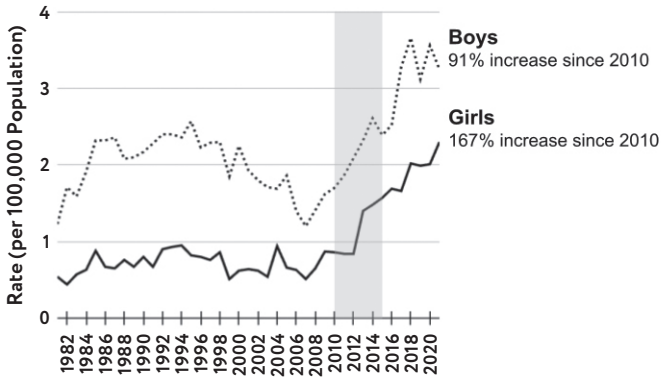
**Figure 1.3.** Percent of U.S. adults reporting high levels of anxiety by age group. (Source: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health.)<sup>11</sup>

## Emergency Room Visits for Self-Harm



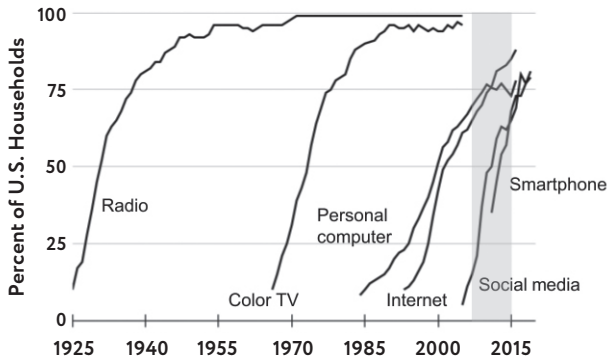
**Figure 1.4.** The rate per 100,000 in the U.S. population at which adolescents (ages 10–14) are treated in hospital emergency rooms for nonfatal self-injury. (Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.)<sup>20</sup>

## Suicide Rates for Younger Adolescents



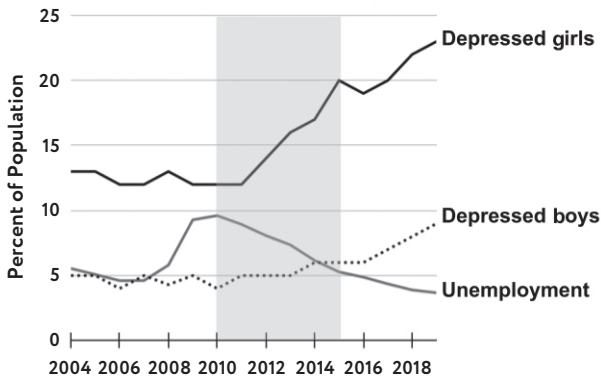
**Figure 1.5.** Suicide rates for U.S. adolescents, ages 10–14. (Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.)<sup>22</sup>

## Communication Technology Adoption



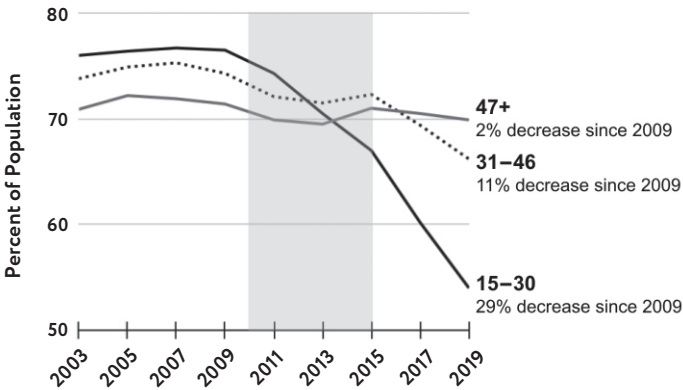
**Figure 1.6.** The share of U.S. households using specific technologies. The smartphone was adopted faster than any other communication technology in history. (Source: Our World in Data.)<sup>25</sup>

## Teenage Depression vs. Adult Unemployment



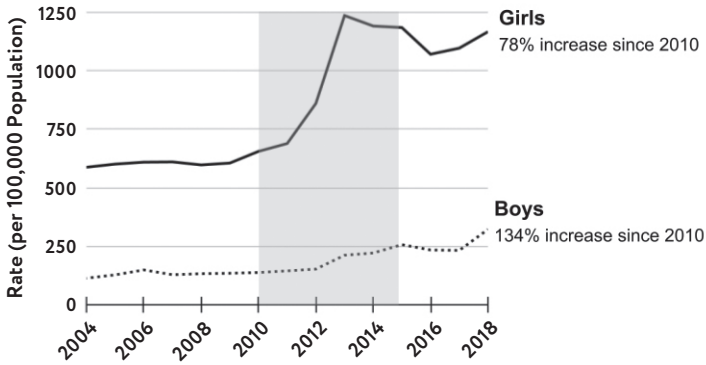
**Figure 1.7.** The U.S. unemployment rate (percent of adults in the labor market who are unemployed) fell continuously as the adolescent mental health crisis got worse. (Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. National Survey Drug Use and Health.)<sup>40</sup>

## Excellent or Very Good Mental Health, Canadian Women



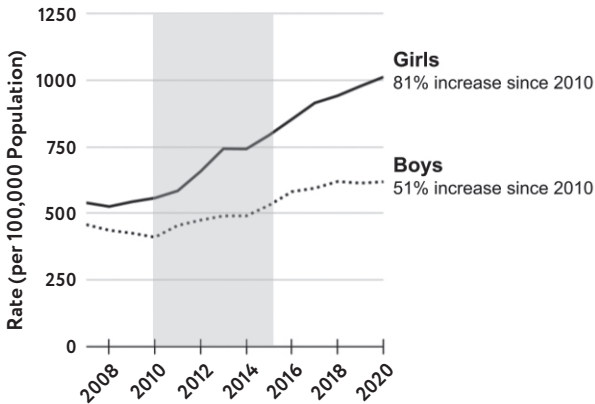
**Figure 1.8.** Percent of girls and women in Ontario, Canada, who reported that their mental health was either “excellent” or “very good.” (Source: D. Garriguet [2021], Portrait of youth in Canada: Data report.)<sup>47</sup>

## Self-Harm Episodes, U.K. Teens



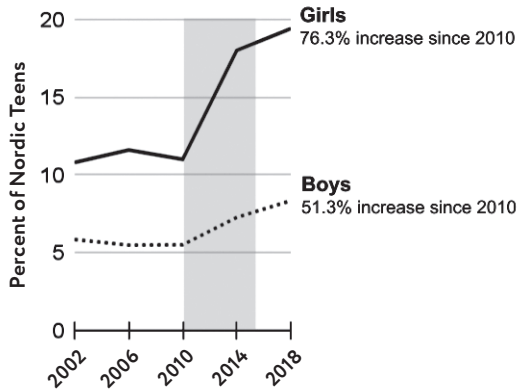
**Figure 1.9.** U.K. teens' (ages 13–16) self-harm episodes. (Source: Cybulski et al., 2021, drawing from two databases of anonymized British medical records.)<sup>51</sup>

## Mental Health Hospitalizations, Australia



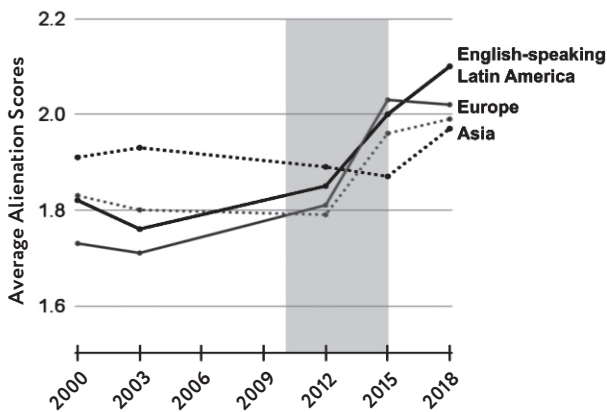
**Figure 1.10.** Rate at which Australian teens (ages 12–24) were kept in hospitals overnight for mental health reasons. (Source: Australia's Health 2022 Data Insights.)<sup>53</sup>

## High Psychological Distress, Nordic Nations



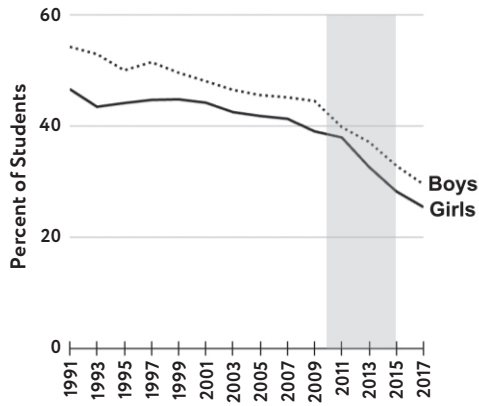
**Figure 1.11.** Percent of Nordic teens with high psychological distress (ages 11–15). (Source: Data from the Health Behavior in School Age Children Survey.)<sup>56</sup>

## Alienation in School, Worldwide



**Figure 1.12.** Worldwide school alienation scores over time (age 15). Note that the increase in school loneliness occurs in all regions other than Asia, mostly between 2012 and 2015. (These questions were not asked in the 2006 and 2009 surveys.) Scores range from 1 (low alienation) to 4 (high alienation). (Source: Twenge, Haidt et al. [2021]. Data from PISA.)<sup>59</sup>

## Meet Up with Friends Daily



**Figure 2.1.** Percentage of U.S. students (8th, 10th, and 12th grade) who say that they meet up with their friends “almost every day” outside school.<sup>12</sup> (Source: Monitoring the Future. I explain how I use this important dataset in the endnotes.)<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 2.2.** Baby geese who had imprinted on Konrad Lorenz’s boots.<sup>29</sup>



## Two Basic Mindsets

### Discover mode (BAS)

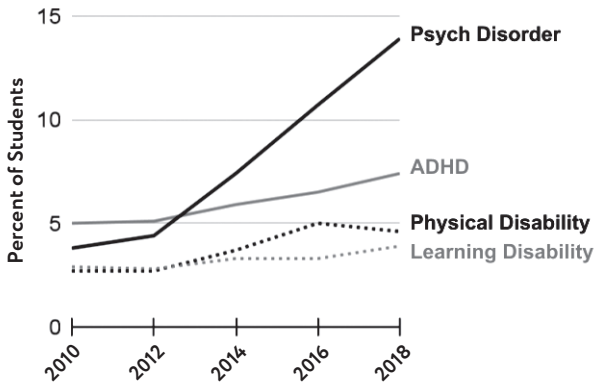
- Scan for opportunities
- Kid in a candy shop
- Think for yourself
- *Let me grow!*

### Defend mode (BIS)

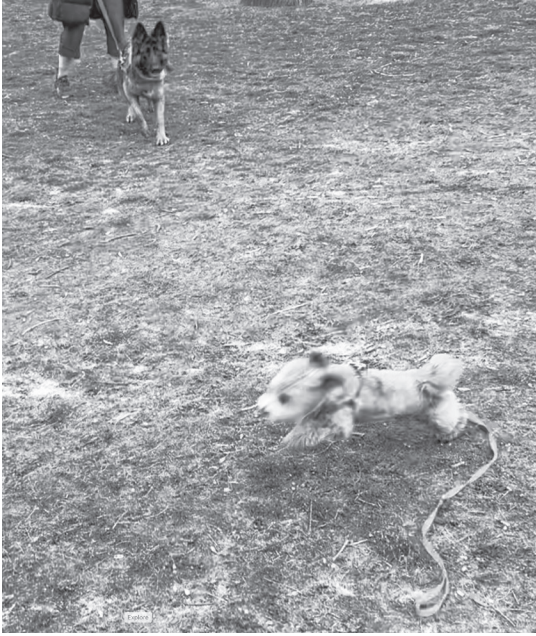
- Scan for dangers
- Scarcity mindset
- Cling to your team
- *Keep me safe!*

**Figure 3.1.** Discover mode versus defend mode, for a student arriving at a university.

## Self-Reported Disabilities, College Freshmen



**Figure 3.2.** Percentage of U.S. college freshmen reporting various kinds of disabilities and disorders. (Source: Annual Freshman Survey, by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute.)<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 3.3.** Wilma, age 7 months, executing a hairpin turn as her sprint toward a German shepherd sharply angled into a sprint away, which was followed by play position and more sprinting toward the larger dog. You can see the video of this interaction in the online supplement.



**Figure 3.4.** An overly dangerous playground in Dallas, Texas, year unknown.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 3.5.** A playground spinner (or merry-go-round), a staple of 1970s playgrounds.<sup>21</sup>



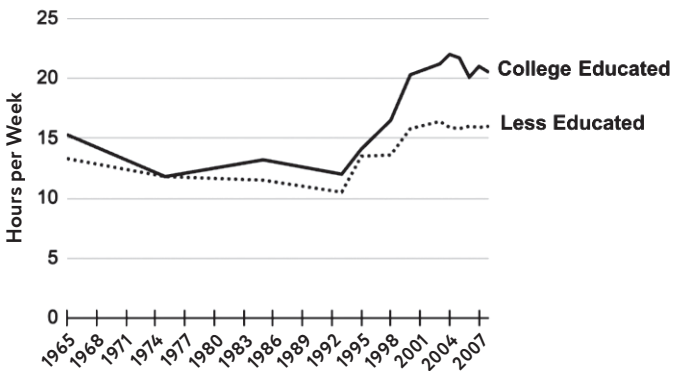
**Figure 3.6.** An overly safe playground, offering little opportunity for antifragile kids to learn how to not get hurt.<sup>23</sup>





**Figure 3.7.** Coney Island, New York City, offers a wide range of dosages of thrills.<sup>24</sup>

## Time Spent Parenting by Mothers

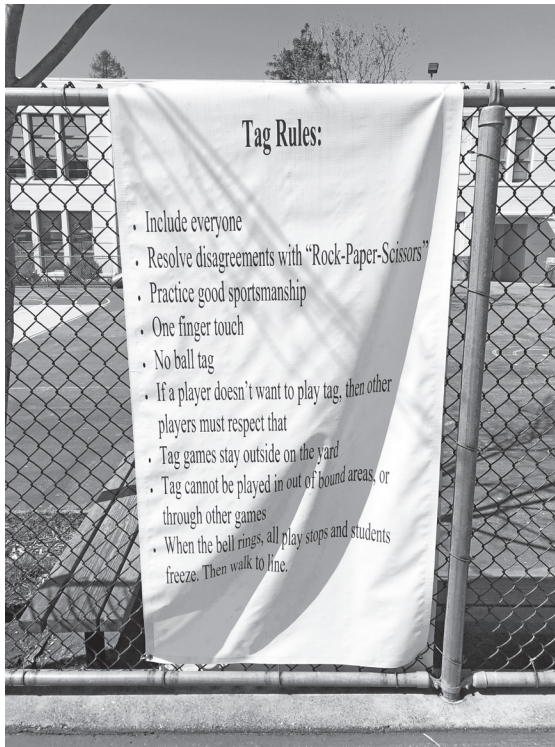


**Figure 3.8.** Time spent parenting by U.S. mothers. Parenting time suddenly increased in the mid-1990s—the beginning of Gen Z. (Source: Ramey & Ramey, 2000.)<sup>31</sup>



*"We've created a safe, nonjudgmental environment that will leave your child ill-prepared for real life."*

**Figure 3.9.** *New Yorker* cartoon by W. Haefeli.<sup>51</sup>



**Figure 3.10.** Restrictions on free play, at an elementary school in Berkeley, California.<sup>53</sup>

## The Attachment System

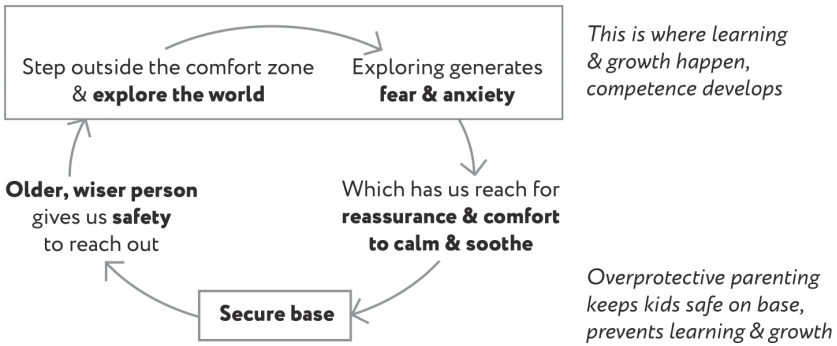


Figure 3.11. The mammalian attachment system.<sup>55</sup>

## Teens Engaging in Adult Activities

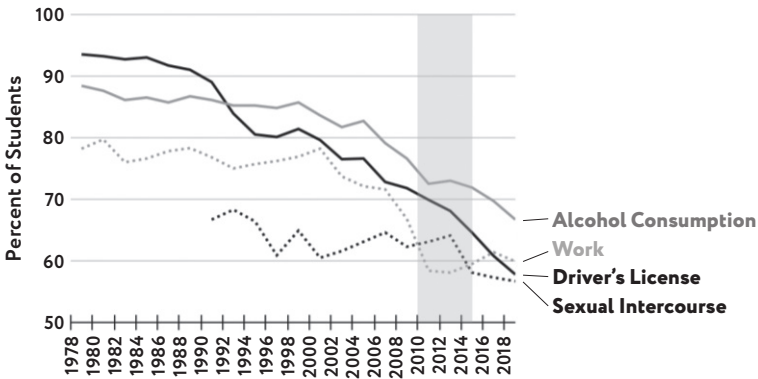
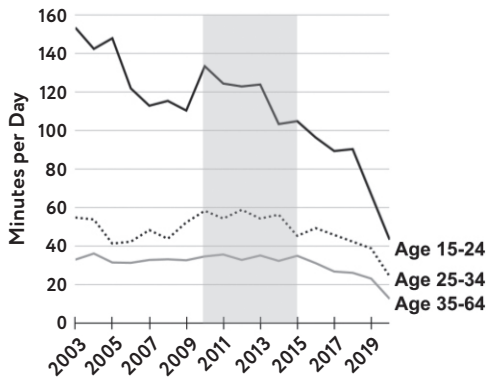


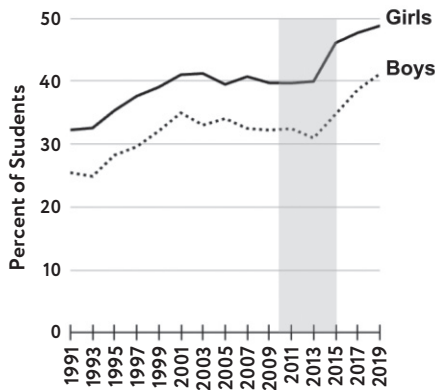
Figure 4.1. The percentage of U.S. high school seniors who have engaged in four adult activities has been declining since the 1990s or early 2000s, prior to the Great Rewiring of 2010 to 2015. (Source: Monitoring the Future and CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey.)<sup>17</sup>

## Daily Time with Friends, by Age Group

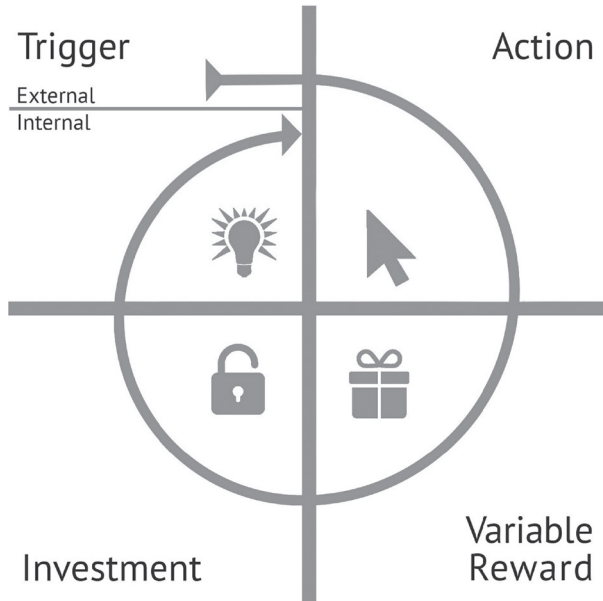


**Figure 5.1.** Daily average time spent with friends in minutes. Only the youngest age group shows a sharp drop before the 2020 data collection, which was performed after COVID restrictions had begun. (Source: American Time Use Study.)<sup>19</sup>

## Teens Who Get Less Than 7 Hours of Sleep

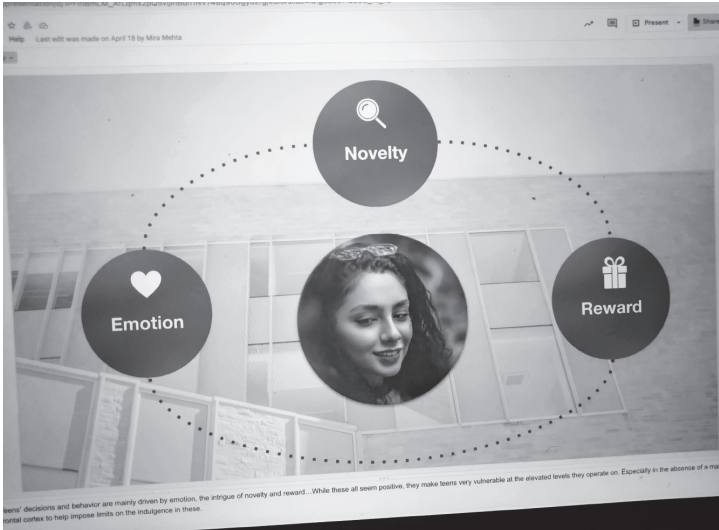


**Figure 5.2.** Percent of U.S. students (8th, 10th, and 12th grade) who get less than seven hours of sleep on most nights. (Source: Monitoring the Future.)<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 5.3.** The Hooked model. From Nir Eyal's 2014 book, *Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products*. In the book, Eyal warned about the ethical implications of misusing the model in a section titled "The Morality of Manipulation."<sup>55</sup>



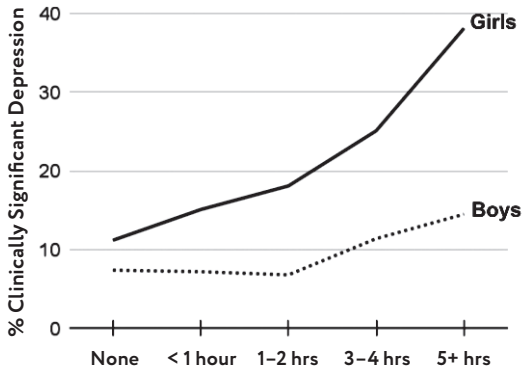


**Figure 5.4.** Screenshot of an internal Facebook presentation, brought out by Frances Haugen. The caption says, “Teens’ decisions and behavior are mainly driven by emotion, the intrigue of novelty and reward. While these all seem positive, they make teens very vulnerable at the elevated levels they operate on. Especially in the absence of a mature frontal cortex to help impose limits on the indulgence in these.” (Source: The Facebook Files, section 42/15, p. 53.)<sup>56</sup>



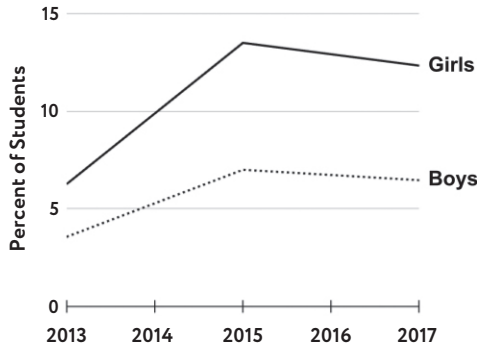
**Figure 6.1.** Drawing made by Alexis Spence in April 2015, age 12. The words on her laptop are "worthless, die, ugly, stupid, kill yourself." The words on her phone are "stupid, ugly, fat." Copied from the court filing in *Spence v. Meta*.<sup>1</sup>

## Depression by Level of Social Media Use, U.K.



**Figure 6.2.** Percent of U.K. teens depressed as a function of hours per weekday on social media. Teens who are heavy users of social media are more depressed than light users and nonusers, and this is especially true for girls. (Source: Millennium Cohort Study.)<sup>11</sup>

## Social Media Super-Users (40+ Hours per Week)

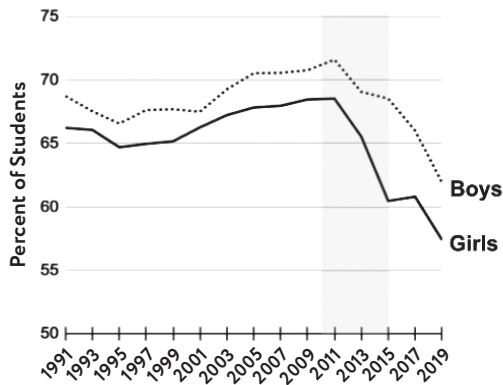


**Figure 6.3.** Percent of U.S. students (8th, 10th, and 12th grade) who reported spending 40 or more hours a week on social media. (Source: Monitoring the Future.)<sup>28</sup>



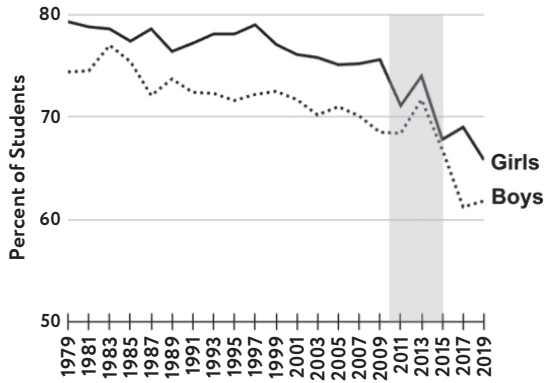
**Figure 6.4.** Beauty filters can make you as perfect as you want to be, which then increases the pressure on other girls to improve their beauty. (Source: Josephine Livin, @josephinelivin, on Instagram.)<sup>37</sup>

## Satisfied with Oneself

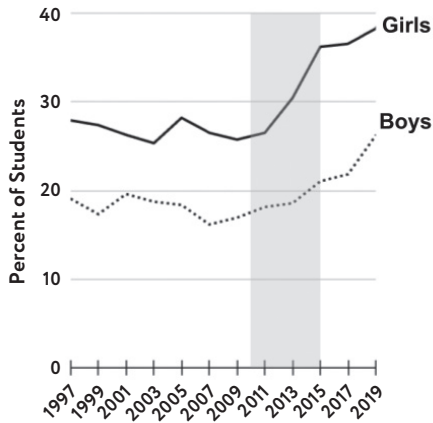


**Figure 6.5.** The sociometer plunge of 2012. Percent of U.S. students (8th, 10th, and 12th grade) who said they were satisfied with themselves. (Source: Monitoring the Future.)

## Have a Few Close Friends

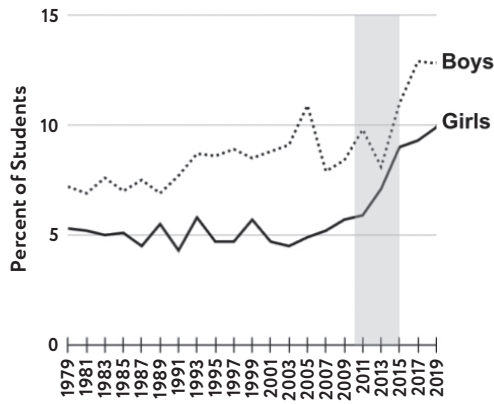


## Often Feel Lonely



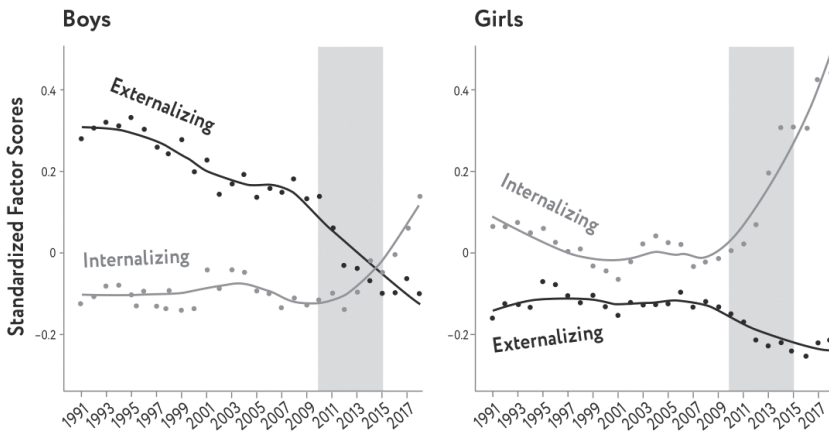
**Figure 6.7.** Percent of U.S. students (8th, 10th, and 12th grade) who agreed or mostly agreed with the statement “A lot of times I feel lonely.” (Source: Monitoring the Future.)

## No Chance of a Successful Life



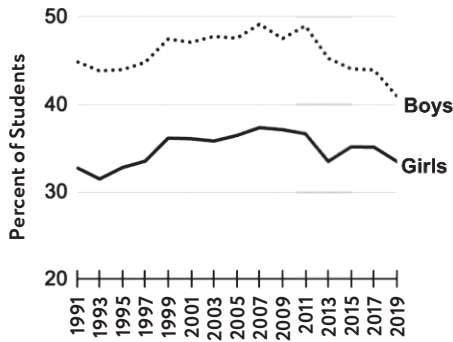
**Figure 7.1.** Percent of U.S. high school seniors who agreed or mostly agreed with the statement “People like me don’t have much of a chance at a successful life.” (Source: Monitoring the Future.)<sup>2</sup>

## Internalizing and Externalizing Symptoms (U.S. Teens)



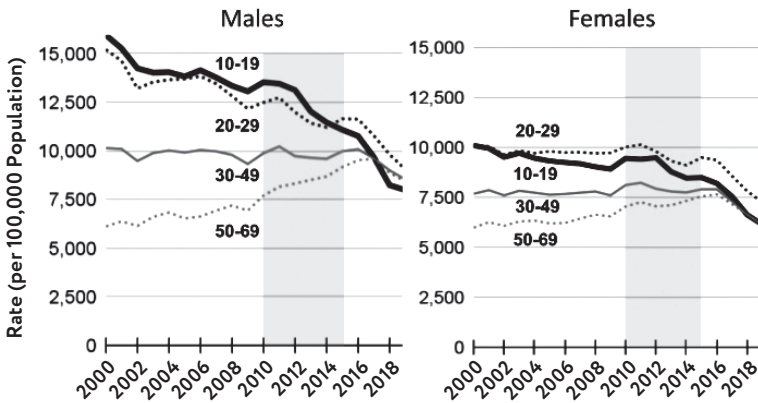
**Figure 7.2.** Internalizing and externalizing symptoms of U.S. high school seniors. In the 2010s, externalizing scores dropped for both sexes while internalizing scores rose. (Source: Askari et al. [2022], with data from Monitoring the Future.)<sup>25</sup>

## Enjoyment of Risk-Taking



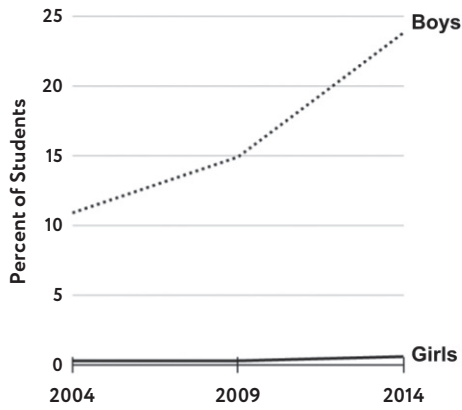
**Figure 7.3.** Percent of U.S. students (8th, 10th, and 12th grade) who agreed with the statement “I like to test myself every now and then by doing something a little bit risky.” Enjoyment of risk-taking declined more rapidly for boys than for girls in the 2010s. (Source: Monitoring the Future.)<sup>26</sup>

## Hospital Admissions for Unintentional Injuries



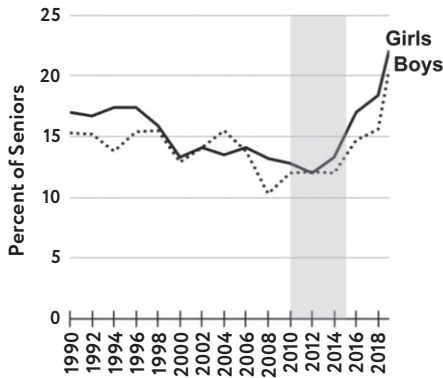
**Figure 7.4.** On the left: Annual rate at which U.S. males are admitted to hospitals for unintentional injuries, by age group. On the right: Same, for U.S. females. Black line is ages 10–19, the age group that used to have the highest rates of injury and now has among the lowest. (Source: Centers for Disease Control.)<sup>28</sup>

## Daily Porn Users, Swedish 12th Graders



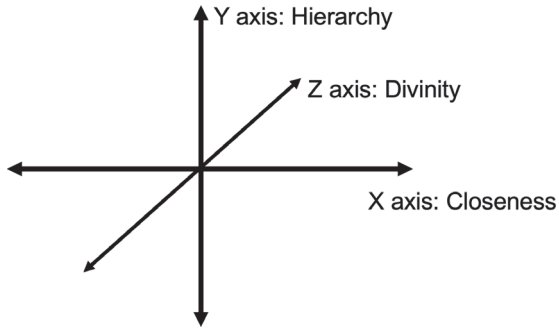
**Figure 7.5.** Percent of Swedish 12th graders who watch pornography “more or less daily.” (Source: Donevan et al., 2022.)<sup>36</sup>

## Life Often Feels Meaningless



**Figure 7.6.** Percent of U.S. high school seniors who agreed or mostly agreed with the statement “Life often feels meaningless.” (Source: Monitoring the Future.)





**Figure 8.1.** Three dimensions of social space.



**Figure 11.1.** The junkyard playground on Governors Island, New York City, designed and run by play:groundNYC.<sup>29</sup>



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

**Figure 12.1.** H. Lin, in *The New Yorker*.<sup>17</sup>