



WHY ARE SO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE UNHAPPY?

DENNIS PRAGER

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To cite just one example, Reuters reported in 2019 that “Suicidal thinking, severe depression and rates of self-injury among U.S. college students more than doubled over less than a decade.”

And unhappiness is hardly confined to Americans. As the social commentator Kay Hymowitz recently wrote, “Germans are lonely, the bon vivant French are lonely, and even the Scandinavians . . . are lonely. The British prime minister . . . recently appointed a ‘Minister of Loneliness.’”

People have more money, better health, better housing, more education, and live longer than at any time in history, but people—especially the young—are unhappier than at any time since data began to be collected.

Why?

There are any number of reasons: increased drug and opioid addiction, less human interaction because of constant cellphone use, and young people’s fears for their future are the most widely offered explanations. But the biggest reason is the loss of values and meaning.

Let’s begin with values, and I’ll focus on America.

The United States was founded on two sets of values: Judeo-Christian and American. This combination created the freest, most opportunity-giving, most affluent country in world history. This is not chauvinism. It is fact. That’s why people from every country on Earth have wanted to emigrate to America—and still do.

Chief among the American values was keeping government as small as possible. This enabled non-governmental institutions—Kiwanis, Rotary and Lions Clubs; book clubs; the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts; bowling leagues; music societies; and, of course, churches—to provide Americans with friends and to provide the neediest Americans with help. But as government has gotten ever larger, many of these non-governmental groups have dwindled in number or simply disappeared.

Another set of values is referred to as middle class or bourgeois values. These include getting married before having a child, making a family, getting a job, self-discipline, delayed gratification, and patriotism.

All of these have been under attack by America's elites, with the following results: The majority of births to millennials are to unmarried women. Yet, according to a 2018 Cigna study, single parents are generally the loneliest of Americans. The percentage of American adults who have never been married and who have no children is at an historic high.

Then there is patriotism. Until the 1960s, Americans grew up loving their country, admiring the Founders, and believing in America's values—most especially, liberty. Americans did not ignore the bad parts of their history, but they were wise enough to recognize that what made America exceptional was not its flaws, which were all universal, but its virtues, which were not. This strong American identity provided generations of Americans with roots, community, optimism, and meaning.

Which brings me to the most important reason for all this unhappiness: a lack of meaning. As Victor Frankl, the renowned Austrian-American psychoanalyst, wrote in his masterpiece, *Man's Search for Meaning*, aside from food, the greatest human need is meaning. And nothing has given Americans—or any other people, for that matter—as much meaning as religion. But in the West since World War II, God and religion have been relegated to the dustbin of history. The result is that more than a third of Americans born after 1980 affiliate with no religion. This is unprecedented in American history. And it's even worse in Europe.

Maybe, just maybe, the decline of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism—those great providers of meaning—is the single biggest factor in the increasing sadness and loneliness among so many young people in America and around the world. A 2016 study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association, JAMA Psychiatry*, found that American women who attended a religious service at least once a week were five times less likely to commit suicide. And common sense suggests this applies to men as well.

Young people have been told God is nonsense, their country is essentially evil, their past is deplorable, their future is bleak, and marriage and children are not important.

Why are so many young people depressed, unhappy, and angry? It's not capitalism, or income inequality, or patriarchy, or even global warming. It's having no religion, no God, and no country to believe in. And what does that leave them with? No meaning.

But there is always Instagram.

I'm Dennis Prager.