Comfortably Uncomfortable: What Intolerance of Discomfort, Toxic Self-Care, and Accommodation are doing to us and our Children

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Mental Health and Kids - Stats

- 9.8% ADHD
- 10% Anxiety (9% males, 11% females)
- 10% Behavioral Problems (10% males, 5% females)
- 4.4% Depression (3% males and 6% females)
- Increase in Depression and Anxiety diagnoses over time and over age range

CDC, 2023

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Teenager Mental Health

- 21% reported ANXIETY symptoms in the past two weeks
- 17% reported DEPRESSION in two weeks
- 40% reported persistant feelings of hopelessness/saddness in the past year
- 20% seriously considered suicide in the past year
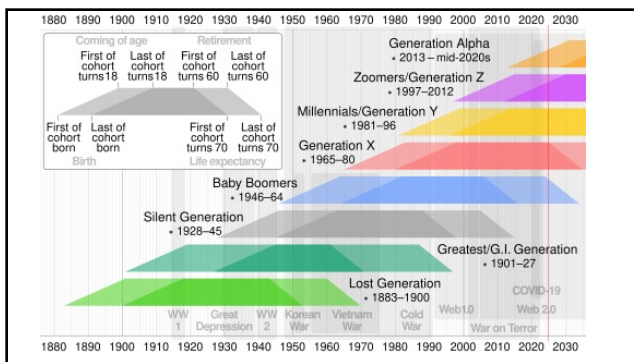- 16% made a suicide plan in the past year

CDC, 2025

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Mental health stats adults

- 12.5% of adults report symptoms of anxiety, chronic worry, and nervousness
- 5% of adults report regular feelings of depression
- 14.8 suicide deaths per 100,000 people
- Evidence that many adults are better equipped to handle stress that adolescents and children

CDC, 2025

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1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010 2020 2030

Coming of age | Retirement

First of cohort turns18 | Last of cohort turns18 | First of cohort turns 60 | Last of cohort turns 60

Generation Alpha
- 2013 – mid-2020s

Zoomers/Generation Z
- 1997–2012

Millennials/Generation Y
- 1981–96

First of cohort born | Last of cohort born | First of cohort turns 70 | Last of cohort turns 70

Generation X
- 1965–80

Birth | Life expectancy

Baby Boomers
- 1946–64

Silent Generation
- 1928–45

Greatest/G.I. Generation
- 1901–27

Lost Generation
- 1883–1900

COVID-19

WW 1 | Great Depression | WW 2 | Korean War | Vietnam War | Cold War | Web1.0 | Web 2.0

War on Terror

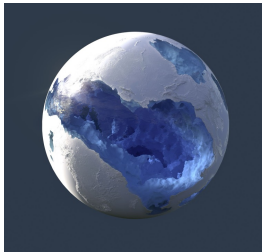1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010 2020 2030

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Generation Z

- People born between 1997 and 2012 (ish)
- Make up nearly a quarter of the world's population
- Most have lived through a recession and pandemic
- More ethnically diverse than any previous generation
    - 1 in 4 Gen Zers are Hispanic
- Most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic than other generations
- On track to be the "best educated generation"

Parker & Igielnik, 2020

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COVID-19 and other changes to GEN Z

- Prior to 2020, would have inherited a strong economy and record low unemployment
- Were the generation most impacted by the pandemic
  - Shift to online school and college
  - More than half lost their jobs or lived in a home with someone who lost their job
  - The generation best equipped to handle the shift to the online world, but also most negatively impacted by this shift

Parker & Igielnik, 2020

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Gen Z and the Internet

- The first generation that was born to the online world
- Have had ready access to the internet
- Older generations acquired online skills, Gen Z learned them from early ages
  - Better equipped to acquire technology early on
- Are more likely to have had online school, socialize online, and use the internet for much more than previous generations
- Most know more about the internet than their parents or caretakers

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Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2013-2023

Ever had sex	Drank alcohol
• 47% in 2013 to 32% in 2023	• 35% in 2013 to 22% in 2023
• Fewer sexual partners, about half use condoms	• Marijuana decreased, so did illicit drugs
	• LGBTQ+ students were most likely to use substances
	• Girls were more likely than boys to try substances

CDC, 2023

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Gen Z Compared to Other Generations

Generation Z (2023)
- Drank Alcohol – 22%
- Had Sex – 32%
- Worked a Job – 32.1%
- Driver's License (2021) – 39.5%

Earlier Generations
- Drank Alcohol (1978) – 88%
- Had Sex (1992) – 66%
- Worked a Job (1980) – 79%
- Driver's License (1983) – 80.4%

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Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2013-2023

Violence	Mental Health
• Threats of violence and avoiding school for safety concerns have gone up • Girls and LGBTQ+ students were more likely to experience violence or bullying • 2 in 10 girls have experienced sexual violence	• Depression was 30% in 2013 to 40% in 2023 • Increases in suicide thoughts and attempts • Girls and LGBTQ+ were more likely to experience MH symptoms

CDC, 2023

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A Crisis With Our Youth?

- From 2010 to 2018, depression in boys and girls doubled
- Self-harms incidences have increased
  - USA – boys increased 91% and girls 167%
  - UK – boys increase by 134% and girls by 78% since 2010
- Overall psychological distress has increased
- Mental health hospitalizations have increased
- Students feel increasingly alienated from schools

CDC, 2025

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But Hasn't it Always Been This way?

- All generations have their defining anxieties
  - Wars
  - Conflict
  - Disease
  - National Debt/financial crisis
- What's different now?
  - People age 47 and up have mostly consistent/stable mental health
  - People age 31-46 have about an 11% decrease in stability
  - People age 15-30 have a 29% decrease in stability

Haidt, 2024

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A Great Rewiring

- Term utilized by Jonathan Haidt, PhD in his book "The Anxious Generation" (2024).
- Mid to late 2000s as a pivotal year in development (Brady et al., 2017)
  - Smartphones were created in 2007
  - In 2009, Facebook added the "like" button
  - In 2009, Twitter added that "retweet" button
  - In 2009, Push notifications developed alerting users of updates throughout the day.
  - 2010 Front facing cameras were placed on phones

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Teens and the Internet

- American College of Pediatrics (2020)
  - 8-12 year old children are spending 5 hours online daily
  - 13-18 year old teens spend 7.5 hours online daily
  - Numbers are entirely for leisure and do not include screen time for schooling
- PEW research (Vogel et al., 2022)
  - 35% of teens say they are on social media "constantly"
  - 45% of teens say they are on the internet "constantly"
  - Many teens report they are "thinking about social media" while doing other tasks in their daily routine
    - 16 hours a day in which these adolescents are thinking about or using the internet. 112 hours weekly.

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Smart Phones

- 81.6% of Americans own a smartphone in 2023
- Average American spends 5 hours and 24 min a day on their phone
- Average American checks their smartphone 96 times a day
- Average American touches their phone 2,617 times a day
- Average American checks their phone once every 10-12 min
- Children on screens have increased by 52% since the start of the pandemic

Almodovar-Suarez et al., 2023

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Smart Phones - Impact

- Reinforces instant gratification
- Limits cognitive capacity (Seo, 2017)
- Social media creates a distorted perception on relationships and can affect relationship outside of cyberspace
- Increased dependency or addictive nature of phones (Seo, 2017)
- Impaired social and emotional skills (Ward et al., 2017)
- Higher rates of depression and anxiety
- Increased nearsightedness in children (Whitfield, 2020)

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Speed of Information

- Society promotes instant gratification
- Children are raised to get what they want instantly
- Inability to delay gratification
- Reinforces demandingness, poor problem solving, and fluid reasoning
- The smart device becomes an extension of the child's cognitive ability
- Decreases Social skills and peer interactions

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Social Media

- Connects us with others in the world
- Explore interests in ways you never considered
- Validate beliefs and feelings
- We have to look at this differently
  - How adults use social media
  - How adolescents use social media
  - How children use social media
- Half of children in a study missed eating and sleeping due to internet use (Lobe et al., 2020)
- Girls are more impacted than boys
  - Creates a curated perception of others that many accept as reality
  - More likely to be affected by FOMO (Twenge, 2017)
    - 27 percent of boys experience FOMO
    - 40% of girls experience FOMO

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Social Media and Gen Z – Top Nine

- Snapchat – 51%
- Tiktok – 44.7%
- Instagram – 33.7%
- X (formerly twitter) – 32.6%
- Reddit – 28.2%
- Pinterest – 25.2%
- YouTube – 25.1%
- WhatsApp – 23.6%
- Facebook – 17.4%

Flores-Marquez, 2023

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Social Media and the Comparative Effect

- Wall Street Journal Article from September 15, 2021
  - 32% of teen girls said they felt worse about their bodies because of Instagram
  - 13% of British and 6% of American suicidal teens reported that Instagram contributed to their desire to kill themselves
  - Teens report increase in Instagram related anxiety and depression
  - One survey in the article reference that up to 90% of teens said that Instagram had a negative impact on their mental health
  - 40% of Instagram users who felt "unattractive" identified that these feelings began while using Instagram
  - 14% of teen boys expressed feeling worse about themselves due to Instagram

Wells et al, 2021

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Social Media, Algorithms, & the Manosphere

A NETFLIX LIMITED SERIES

Stephen Graham   Ashley Walters   Erin Doherty   Owen Cooper

- Algorithms feed into the distorted perceptions shared by youth
- Lack of real-world experiences to compare
- Manosphere is an online men's community rooted in masculinity, misogyny, and anti-feminism
- Targets isolated boys and young men who feel disenfranchised by society
  - Andrew Tate
  - Jordan Peterson
  - 80/20 rule
  - 60/30 rule
- Creates false perceptions of relationships, women, and values

Snyder, 2025 and Baker, Ging, & Anderson, 2024

A child accused. Everyone left to answer.

ADOLESCENCE

ONLY ON NETFLIX | MARCH 13

23

Recommending Toxicity: The role of algorithmic recommender functions on YouTube Shorts and TikTok in promoting male Supremacist influencers (2024)

- Created fake accounts for teenage boys
- Male-coded terms related to gaming, sports, and fitness
- Within 9 minutes, the accounts began receiving "troubling content" from the manosphere
- More extreme anti-feminism content within 23 minutes
- Male supremacy videos within 2-3 hours.
- If the account viewed an entire video, their For You pages began offering 78% misogynistic "alpha-male" and anti-feminism content
- Algorithms showed Right-wing conspiracy content, anti-transgender content, and racist content

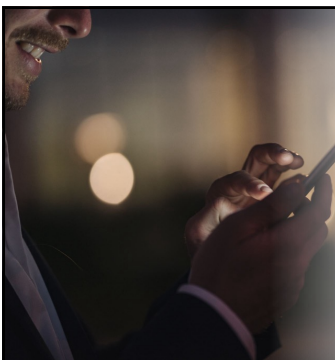Baker, Ging, & Anderson, 2024

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Risk Factors for Boys in the Manosphere

- Socially isolated from others, particularly girls/women
- History of being bullied
- Spend much of their lives online
- Depressed or anxious boys
- Boys who have been unsuccessful in relationships
- Entitlement
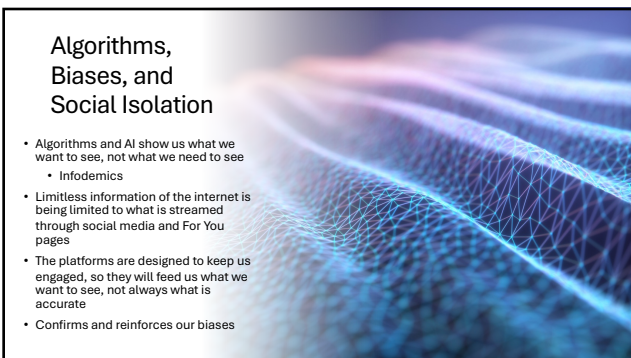
Baker, Ging, & Anderson, 2024

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Pornography

- Some studies suggest as much as 40% of all internet traffic is porn
- 24% of adolescent boys access porn daily
- Adolescent boys who watched porn
  - 59% "always stimulating"
  - 22% "habitual"
  - 10% Reduces real-life sexual interest
  - 10% "kind of an addiction
- Reinforces instant gratification and entitlement
- Why put in the effort of an actual relationship when you can feel good looking at porn?

Pizzol et al., 2016

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Algorithms, Biases, and Social Isolation

- Algorithms and AI show us what we want to see, not what we need to see
  - Infodemics
- Limitless information of the internet is being limited to what is streamed through social media and For You pages
- The platforms are designed to keep us engaged, so they will feed us what we want to see, not always what is accurate
- Confirms and reinforces our biases

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Isolation as a Society and with Younger Generations

- As a whole, adults are spending more time alone
  - 285 min per day in 2003 to 333 min/day pre-COVID 2020
- Adults are spending less time with friends
  - 60 minutes per day in 2003 to 20 min/day pre-COVID 2020
- Adolescents are spending SIGNIFICANTLY less time with friends
  - 155 minutes per day in 2003 to 41 minutes per day in pre-COVID 2020

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Increased Isolation, Increased Risk

- Cardiovascular Disease
- Dementia
- Infectious Diseases
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Poor Overall Health
- Substance Abuse
- Overdose
- Suicide

Kannan & Veazie (2023)

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AI and the Convenience Contradiction

- CC is the immediate answers and comfort are prioritized and how this can have negative impact on our long term goals and values
- AI is answering questions, but can also do so in an effort to keep us engaged
  - AI Hallucinations
- Adolescents and Gen Zers engaged in relationships with AI
  - The AI meets all their needs selflessly
  - Creates an unrealistic perception of relationships

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Implications of GEN Z and Youth Isolating

- Substituting in person relationships with online, digital connections
  - We call connections because it does not have the same impact on development as relationships
- Lack of relationships are not being replaced with time with family
  - GEN Z and adolescents are spending less time with family as well
- Socialization is a key component of an adolescent's development
- This decline in socialization, especially during key developmental periods, can have serious implications to physical health, mental health, and longevity as these generations age

Kannan & Veazie, 2023

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Harms to Generation Z

In person social contact is limited
They are not experiencing the developmental stages in a way that allows them to develop healthy relationships and sense of self

Lack of sleep
Amount of students who receive less than 7 hours of sleep nightly has nearly doubled since 1991

Disruptions in attention
Ping notifications on phones, the sight/presence of phones, "second screening" all other interruptions

Compulsive Behaviors/Addiction
Dopamine and other rewards for continued use of social media, internet, and screens

Coe, et al., 2022

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Gen Z and jobs

- By the end of 2024, 60% of companies cut Gen Z employees they hired that year (Sladovnik, 2024).
- 966 Businesses surveyed
  - 75% reported young workers' performances were "unsatifactory"
  - 50% believe these workers lack motivation
  - 46% believe they lack professionalism
  - 39% have poor communication skills

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Gen Z in the Workplace

- Look past sterotypes with younger generations (laziness, entitlement, immaturity)
- Gen Z lacks motivation
  - Witnessed financial crisis, COVID, and job losses. They are skeptical
- Poor communication skills
  - Stronger online skills does not translate into interpersonal skills
  - Many exist primarily online and lack interpsonal communcation
  - COVID-19 worsened this significantly
  - Work from home was good for safety, but limited networking and development

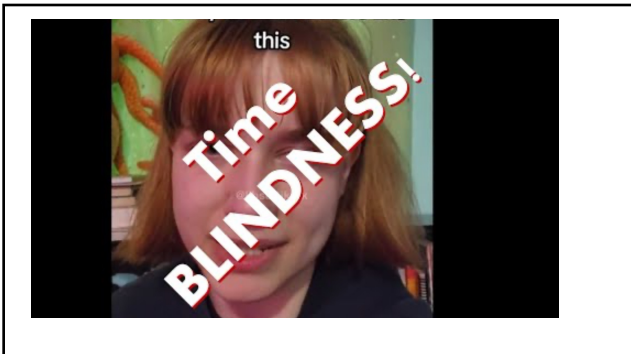Parker & Igielnik, 2020

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Gen Z in the workplace

- Differing perceptions on work ethic and effort
  - Reject the working beyond 40 hour mentality
  - Value work/life balance
  - Are more likely to leave a company that values working long hours or the "hustle culture."
  - Skill acquisition often goes beyond the job description or standard work day
- Social media misrepresents work and attainable lifestyles
  - Overvalue what they are worth, creating barriers to hire
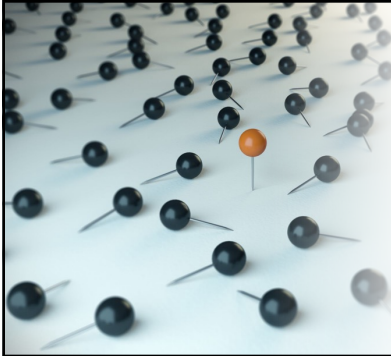 - Promote lifestyles that are unattainable at such a young age

Parker & Igielnik, 2020

35

this

Time BLINDNESS!
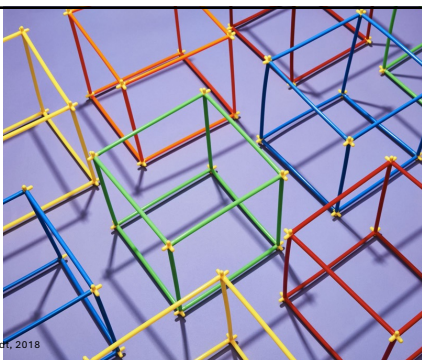
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Gen Z in the Workplace

- Lack of Professionalism
  - Unorganized, unprofessional, and poor time management
  - Employers report Gen Z being late for work, meetings, and do not answer communication in a timely manner
  - Many do not wear work appropriate clothing and using language not appropriate for the workplace
  - Demand exceptions to account for these behaviors
- Gen Z are less likely to take a job if the company does not align with their values

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Safety and Safetyism

- Perceptions of danger and safety
  - Child car seats
  - Floatation devices
- Presented as being bipolar in nature but really there are many shades of gray
- Emotional safety vs. exploring feelings and worldview
- It blocks experience

Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018

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Fragility

- Individuals begin to feel as though they cannot handle things
- Rather than overcome stressors and differences, they experience fear or anxiety in the presence of these factors
- They feel as though they may be irrevocably damaged if exposed to an adverse experience or something they find to be "triggering."
- Our immune systems require threats and stressors to adapt and protect us from harm
- "Wind extinguishes a candle but energizes a fire." (Taleb, 2012 page 5).

FRAGILE
HANDLE WITH CARE

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How We Instill Fragility

- Hygiene Hypothesis (Gopnik, 2016)
  - Food allergies rose 18% from 1997-2007 (Waggoner, 2013)
  - Peanut Allergies have doubled over the past ten years
  - Rise in gluten intolerance may be linked to carb restriction (Heel, 2005)
- Decreased use of risky play (Haidt, 2024).
  - Fearful parenting impacts how children play
  - Discover mode vs. Defend mode
  - Children are learning to defend against danger rather than grow
  - Children exposed to small risks grow to be adults who can handle risk
  - Children never go outside of their comfort zone, inhibiting development and growth

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ART AND CULTURE   HEALTHCARE

Moms arrange playdates for their college kids on Facebook, WhatsApp: report

JENNIFER KABBANY - FIX EDITOR   •   NOVEMBER 20, 2023

Some moms are taking helicopter parenting to a whole new level.

A new **report** in *New York* magazine describes how some moms arrange playdates for their college kids on social media apps such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

It's a trend that's an outgrowth of groups created for parents of students at various universities: "Some groups are schoolwide, while others are specific to a cohort — graduating class, dorm, fraternity or sorority, team sport," the magazine reported.

While much of the online banter is basic questions and helpful tips, some moms fret for their

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What Are We Protecting Kids From?

- Increased emphasis on apps, tracking sex offenders, and monitoring crime/police in neighborhoods
- Keep children safe from the outside world
- Research shows the world is likely a safer place then during other generations
- It's not that we have more sex offenders and violent crime, it's more representative as to our access to that information
- We are reading news of violence and stress, making assumptions about the world

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What Are We NOT Protecting Kids From?

- Because of safetyism, kids are outside less than ever
- Spending more time inside, online
- Completely unprotected from the online world
- Much more difficult to protect and monitor kids online
- Access to offenders, bullying, pornography, frightening content, etc.
- Online world cannot always be regulated.
  - Movies and TV vs. online videos and shorts

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Psychological Safety/Accommodating

- Positives of psychological safety
- How psychological safety can be an accommodation
- Mis-application of terms
  - Safety
  - Trauma
- Trigger warnings!
- Over-focus on safetyism and fragility negatively impacts growth
  - Decreases resiliency

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Adverse Child Experiences vs. Normal Child Development

Adverse Child Experiences
- Child maltreatment/abuse
- Parental substance use
- Neglect
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Exposure to real trauma
- Bullying

Normal Child Development
- Feeling anxious about going to school
- Getting a bad grade on a test
- Experiencing conflict with peers
- Feelings of sadness, normalized anxiety, and other emotions

Gopnik, 2016

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Consequences of Childhood Accommodation

- Child becomes dependent on the accommodations
- Increased anxiety when the accommodations are not met
- Conflict with others
- Development of personality characteristics such as entitlement and dependency
- Social alienation
- Developing cognition around their life of being coddled
- Can alienate other children in the home

Julian, 2020
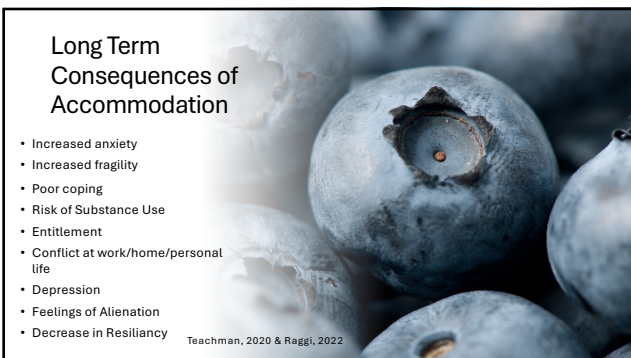
46

Accommodation: The Anti-Therapy

- Increase in comfort, decrease in exposure
- Reinforces helplessness and dependency on others
- Failure to develop resiliency
- Failure to develop the skills to overcome most of life's obstacles.
- "Prepare the child for the road, not the road for the child."

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Long Term Consequences of Accommodation

- Increased anxiety
- Increased fragility
- Poor coping
- Risk of Substance Use
- Entitlement
- Conflict at work/home/personal life
- Depression
- Feelings of Alienation
- Decrease in Resiliency

Teachman, 2020 & Raggi, 2022

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Frustration Intolerance

- Comfort is first and most important
- Any threat to this perceived comfort is met with negative emotions
- Four factors
  - Any emotional distress is overwhelming and should be avoided
  - Expectation that life should be free from any inconvenience
  - Entitlement and instant gratification
  - Very high standards for behavior and achievement and frustration when these are not met

Ellis, 2023 & Harrigton, 2005

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Frustration Tolerance into Emotional Intolerance

- Any unpleasant emotions are rejected by the person
- Linked to:
  - Anxiety
  - Anger
  - Depression
  - Entitlement
  - Self-harm
  - Dependency on medication
  - Substance abuse
- Reject the outside world in favor of internet and an increase in behavioral addictions (internet use, gaming, or gambling)

Vukosavljevic-Gvozden (2011)
Kewalaramani & Pandey (2020)

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Maladaptive Daydreaming

- The need to daydream or engage in fantasy that replaces human interactions and disrupts daily life
- Daydreams fulfill fantasy, offer companionship, and improve mood
- This has become an increasingly common occurrence in Gen Z and younger
- More likely to have issues with frustration intolerance, emotional intolerance, and prone towards entitlement
- Decreases resiliency

Nowacki & Pyszkowska, 2024

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Entitlement

- One of the fastest growing personality traits we see in society today
- Not just limited to the younger generations
- Focus on instant gratification, access to information, overload
- I am entitled to feel good now
- I am entitled to not experience un-comfortability
- Feeling special, unique
- Can develop into narcissism
  - Is often a dynamic of offending

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Types of Entitlement

- Academic Entitlement
- Medical Entitlement
- Entitlement in the workplace
- Entitlement in Relationships
- Food Entitlement

It is an encouraging thought to live in a society where everyone accepts you for who you are, but if everyone expects special treatment, then it is extremely unlikely that anyone's needs will be met. People can accommodate disability and restrictions, but they should not have to accommodate someone else's un-comfortability or resistance to grow.

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Toxic Positivity

- Power of Positive thinking (Peale, 1952)
- We should feel happy all of the time
- Denial, shame and other emotions disguised as positivity
- Often reflect our own discomfort with the situation or the person
- "Good Vibes Only"
- "Hang in there"
- A lack of authenticity in favor of making the person feel better in the moment

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How Positivity Becomes Toxic

- When someone is looking for support or compassion and they are met with a positive affirmation
- Shames people into believing they are not enough
- Invalidates feelings/experiences
- Instill shame for not being happy enough
- Gaslighting a person's genuine experience
- Instills that the bad things in a person's life are their own fault

Goodman, 2022

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Signs of Toxic Positivity

- Experiencing guilt for being sad or angry
- Reciting "positive' quotes about hard situations
- Dismissing others' difficult feelings
- Hiding painful emotions
- Ignoring your problems

Just stay POSITIVE.

verywell

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Examples of Toxic Positivity

- Life will never give you more than you can handle
- You'll be fine
- Don't cry
- You have so much to be gratefule for
- Time heals all wounds
- Just be happy. Stay positive
- At least it's not _____

- Attitude is everything!
- This too shall pass
- It could be worse....
- This is a learning experience
- Everything happens for a reason
- Cut the negativity out of your life
- Never give up!

Goodman, 2022

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What Toxic Positivity is Actually Used For:

- Ending the conversation
- Invalidating someone else's feelings/experience
- Reinforce that people should be happy all of the time
- Deny the stress of the current situation
- Avoid/shift all responsibility
- Attempt (and often fail) to make people feel better

Whitman, 2022

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Things to Remember

- Timing is everything, give someone the chance to feel the experience
- Time does not heal all wounds
- People may need to accept the reality of their situation BEFORE moving forward
- Not everything has a positive/silver lining
- People will find the positivity to confirm their biases online, we can offer support that allows them to better resolve those feelings

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Avoiding the Uncomfortable: The Impact

- Blocked transition into adulthood
  - Less likely to get a job
  - Less likely to learn to drive
  - Less likely to consume alcohol
  - Less likely to have sex
- Not as necessary to navigate the digital world
- Fewer relationships, difficulty managing those
- Increase in mental health symptoms
- Reinforces fragility

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Talk to Your Kids

- Discuss their online use and interests
- Talk about how these relate to values. If they are heavily aligned on one side, explore their beliefs about the other
- Ask them to share about relevant or impactful influencers
  - Don't react with disgust or anger towards these, talk to why your children are interested in them
- Ask younger people to consider the real people in their lives. How do they compare or contrast to online relationships?

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Consequences to our Society

- Difficulty in managing stress
- Inability to connect with others
- Furthering divides/conflict
- Individual entitlement/narcissism
- Unrealistic expectations
- Decreased cognitive processing
- Decreased problem solving
- Isolation
- Anxiety/Stress

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A Path to More Effective Self-Care

- Watching people experience pain can be stressful for you too.
- Finding a quick solution doesn't allow us to develop an understanding, it only reinforces that this bad thing made us uncomfortable
- People are more likely to change if they feel uncomfortable.
- Sit with discomfort. Talk with people about it
- Reach out to supports, not just confirming "yes men/women"
- Am I looking for accommodation when I should consider accountability?

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Resources

- https://positivemasculinity.org.au/
- https://beyondequality.org
- The Now and Men Podcast

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