

Summary of Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation*

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Classical Conversations – South Durham

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Thesis: The Great Rewiring of 2010-2015 had devastating effects on kids' mental health and must be rolled back through collective action.

- Part 1. A Tidal Wave
- Part 2. The Backstory: The decline of the play-based childhood
- Part 3. The Great Rewiring: The rise of the phone-based childhood
- Part 4. Collective Action for healthier childhood

Chapter 1 – The Surge of Suffering

Communication Technology Adoption

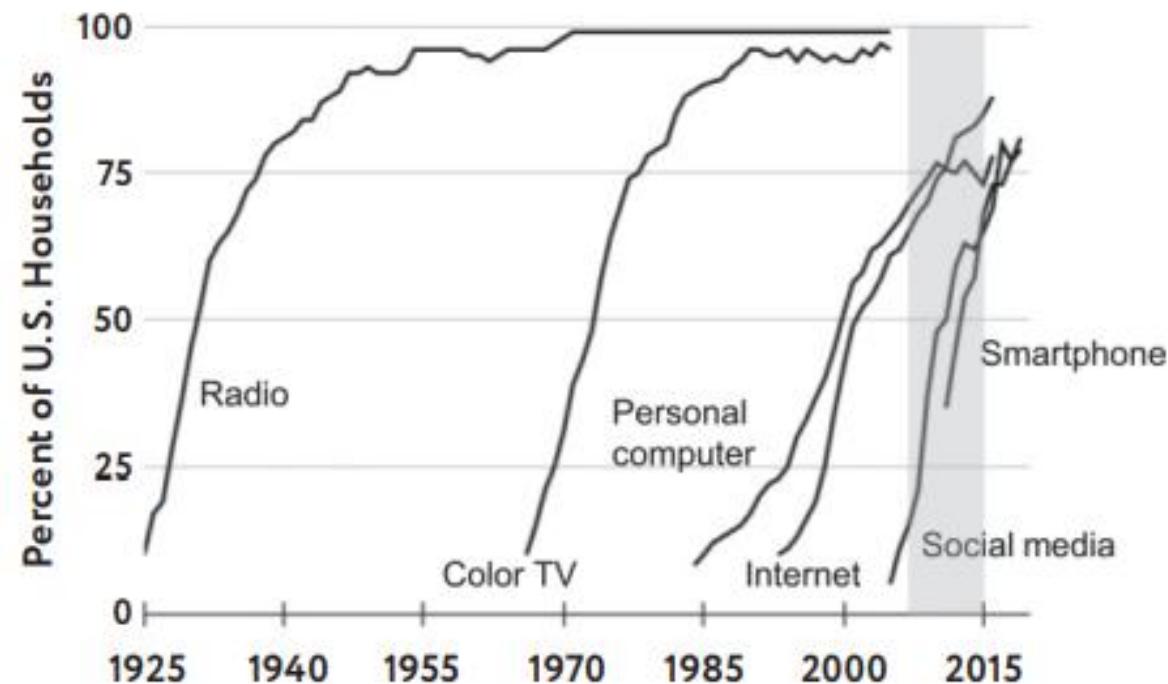


Figure 1.6. The share of U.S. households using specific technologies. The smartphone was adopted faster than any other communication technology in history. (Source: Our World in Data.)²⁵

Chapter 1 – The Surge of Suffering

Major Depression Among Teens

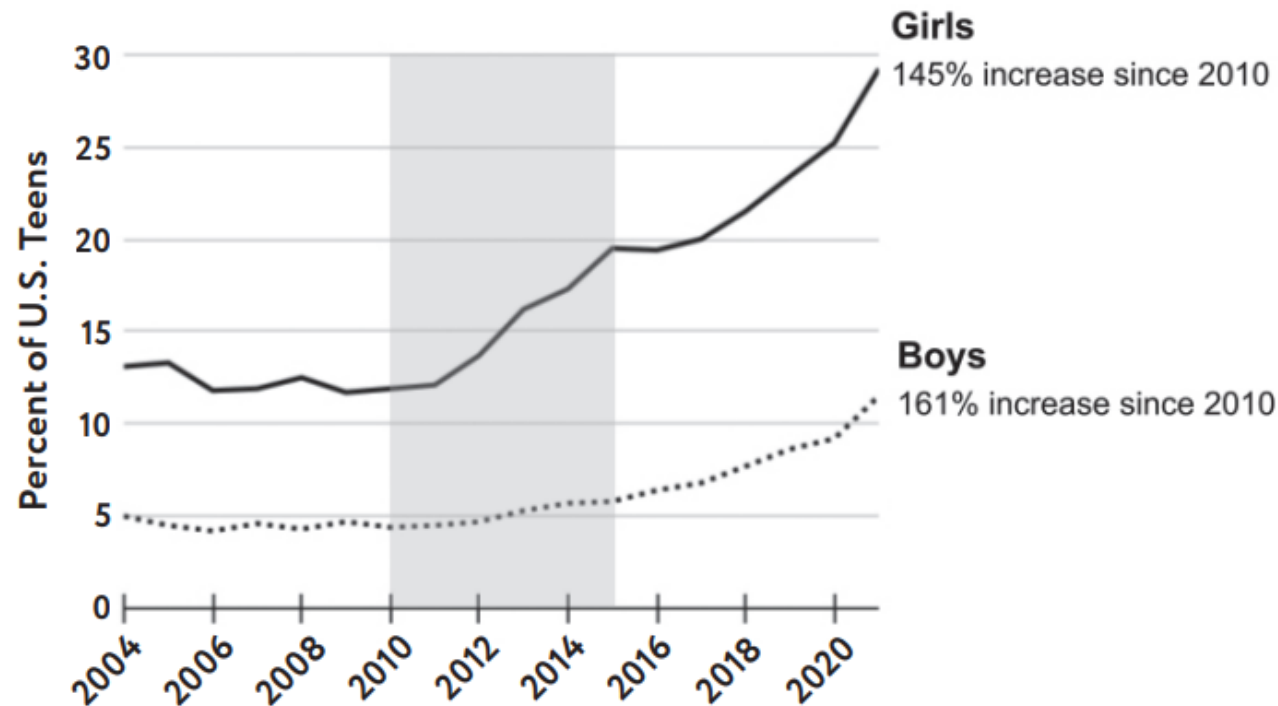


Figure 1.1. Percent of U.S. teens (ages 12–17) who had at least one major depressive episode in the past year, by self-report based on a symptom checklist. This was figure 7.1 in *The Coddling of the American Mind*, now updated with data beyond 2016. (Source: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health.)³

Chapter 1 – The Surge of Suffering

Mental Illness Among College Students

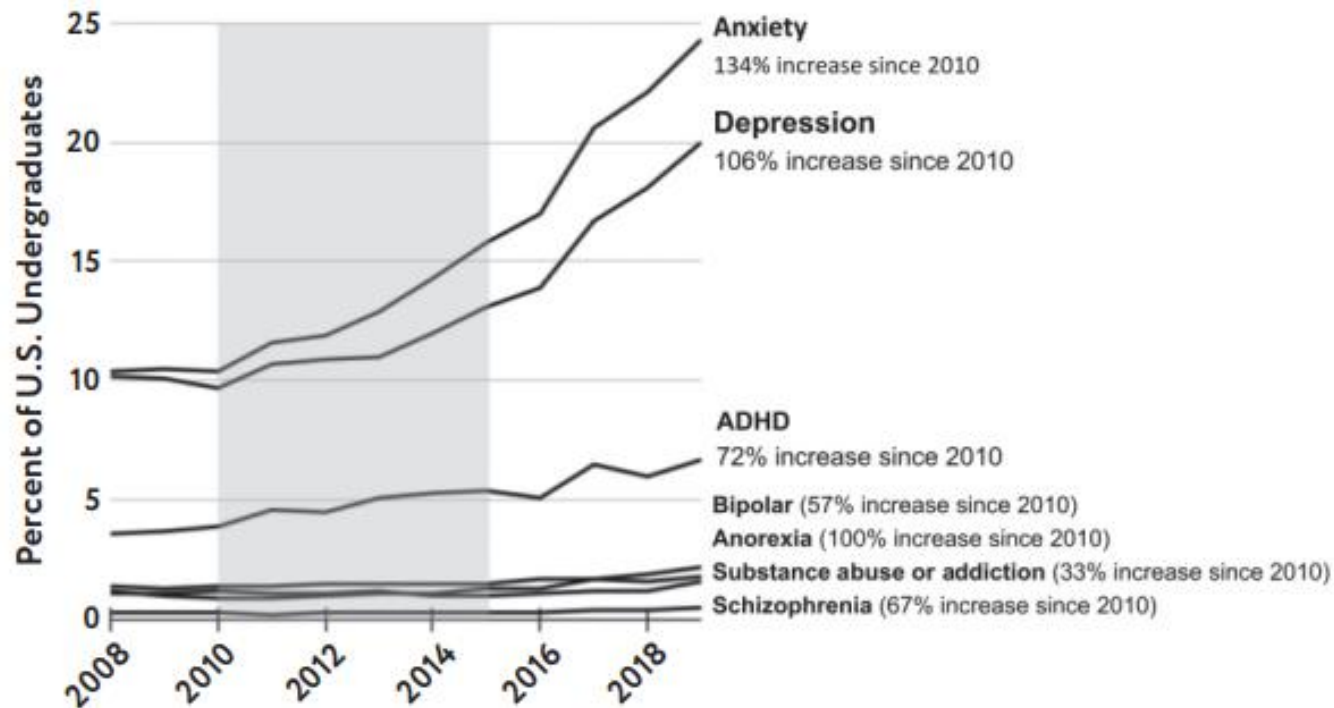


Figure 1.2. Percent of U.S. undergraduates with each of several mental illnesses. Rates of diagnosis of various mental illnesses increased in the 2010s among college students, especially for anxiety and depression. (Source: American College Health Association.)⁹

Chapter 1 – The Surge of Suffering

Anxiety Prevalence by Age

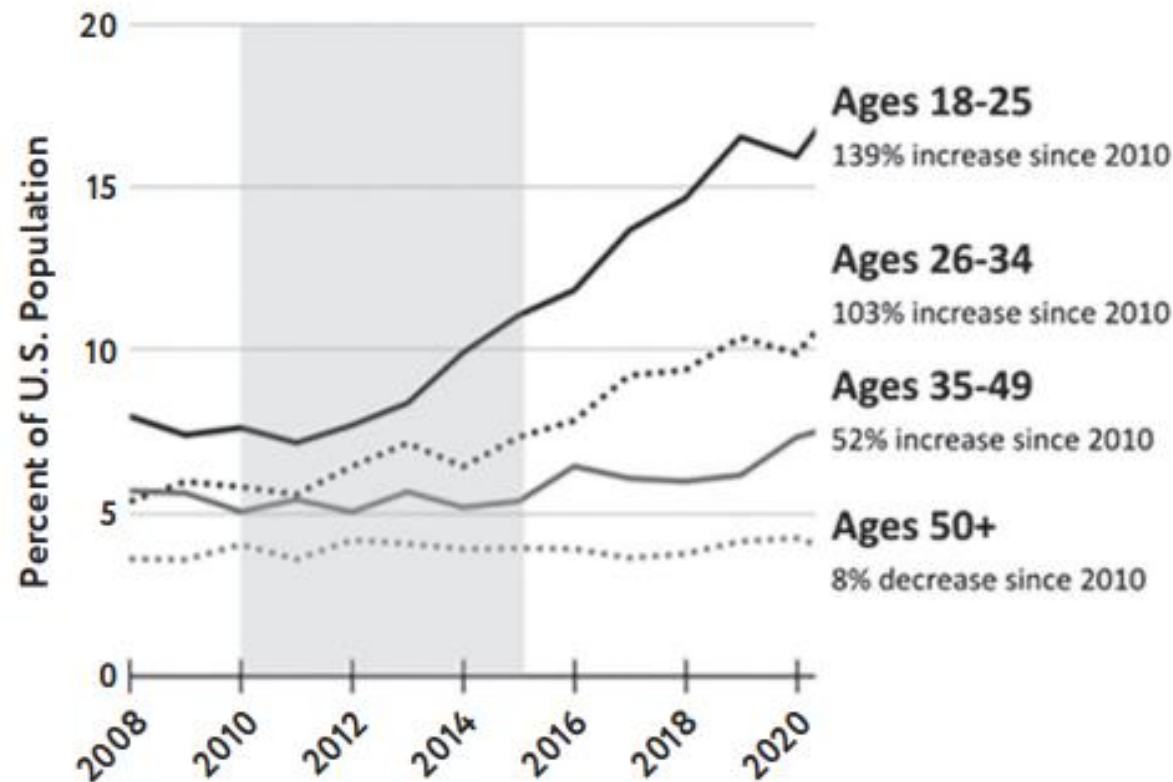


Figure 1.3. Percent of U.S. adults reporting high levels of anxiety by age group.
(Source: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health.)¹¹

Chapter 1 – The Surge of Suffering

- “Between 2010 and 2015, the social lives of American teens moved largely onto smartphones”
- “The first generation of Americans who went through puberty with smartphones... in their hands became more anxious, depressed, self-harming, and suicidal.”
- “The tidal wave of anxiety, depression, and self-harm... hit preteen girls hardest of all.”
- “The increase in suffering was not limited to the United States”
- “No other theory has been able to explain why rates of anxiety and depression surged among adolescents” (p. 44-45)

IRL versus social media

Real life

- *Embodied*
- *Synchronous*
- *One-to-one or one-to-several*
- *High bar for entry and exit*

Social media

- *Disembodied*
- *Asynchronous*
- *One-to-many*
- *Low bar for entry and exit*

Chapter 2 – What Do Children Need to Do in Childhood

Meet Up with Friends Daily

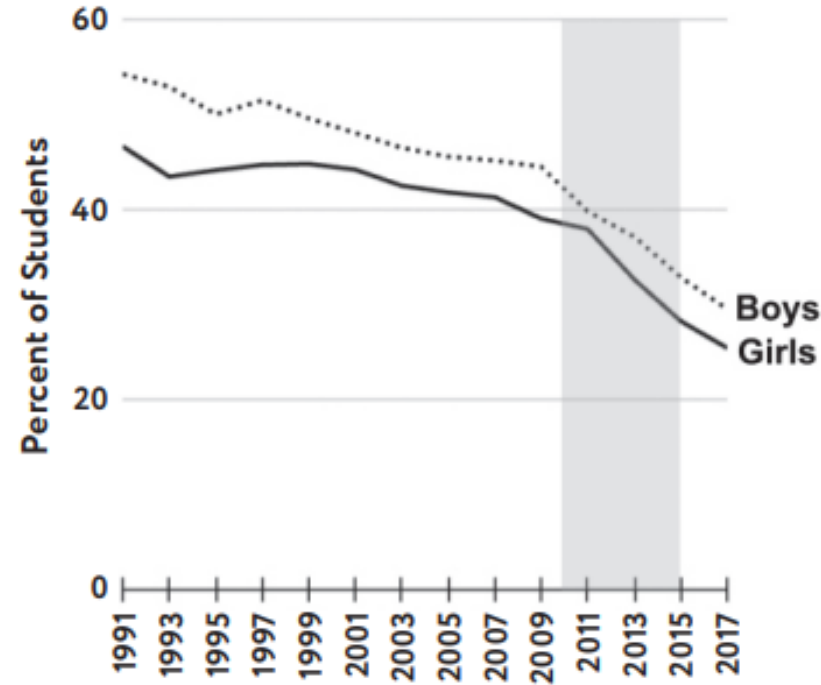


Figure 2.1. Percentage of U.S. students (8th, 10th, and 12th grade) who say that they meet up with their friends “almost every day” outside school.¹² (Source: Monitoring the Future. I explain how I use this important dataset in the endnotes.)¹³

Chapter 5 – The Four Foundational Harms

Harm #1: Social deprivation

Harm #2: Sleep deprivation

Harm #3: Attention fragmentation

Harm #4: Addiction

Chapter 5 – The Four Foundational Harms

Daily Time with Friends, by Age Group

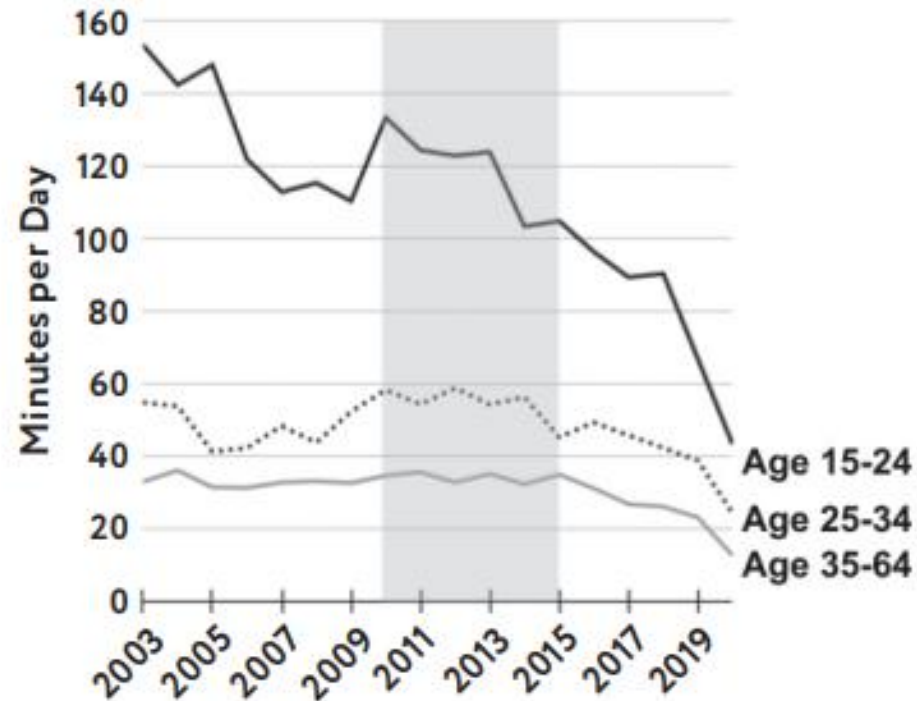


Figure 5.1. Daily average time spent with friends in minutes. Only the youngest age group shows a sharp drop before the 2020 data collection, which was performed after COVID restrictions had begun. (Source: American Time Use Study.)¹⁹

Chapter 5 – The Four Foundational Harms

Teens Who Get Less Than 7 Hours of Sleep

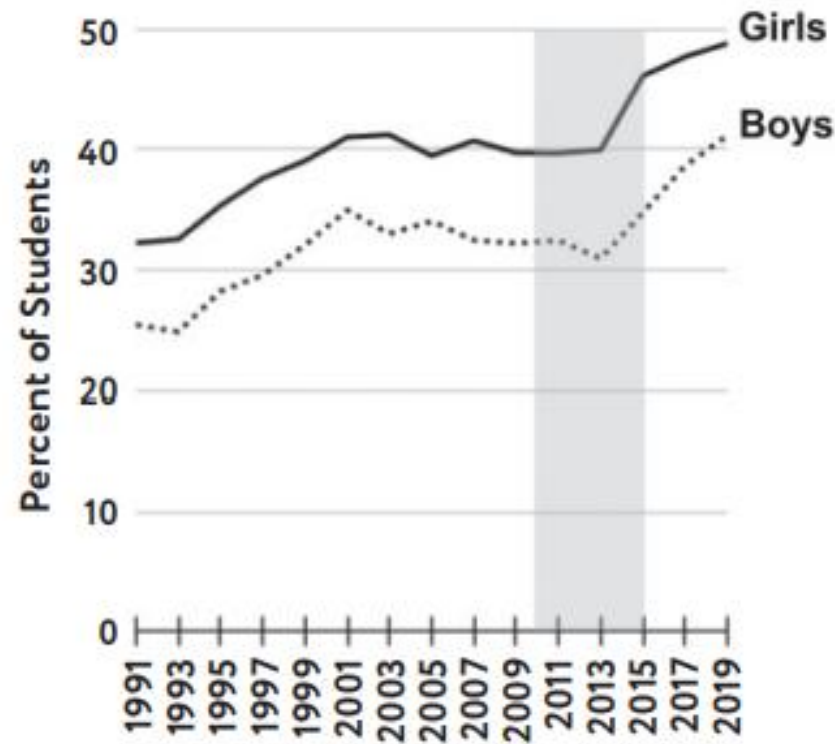


Figure 5.2. Percent of U.S. students (8th, 10th, and 12th grade) who get less than seven hours of sleep on most nights. (Source: Monitoring the Future.)³³

Chapter 6 – Why Social Media Harms Girls More Than Boys

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

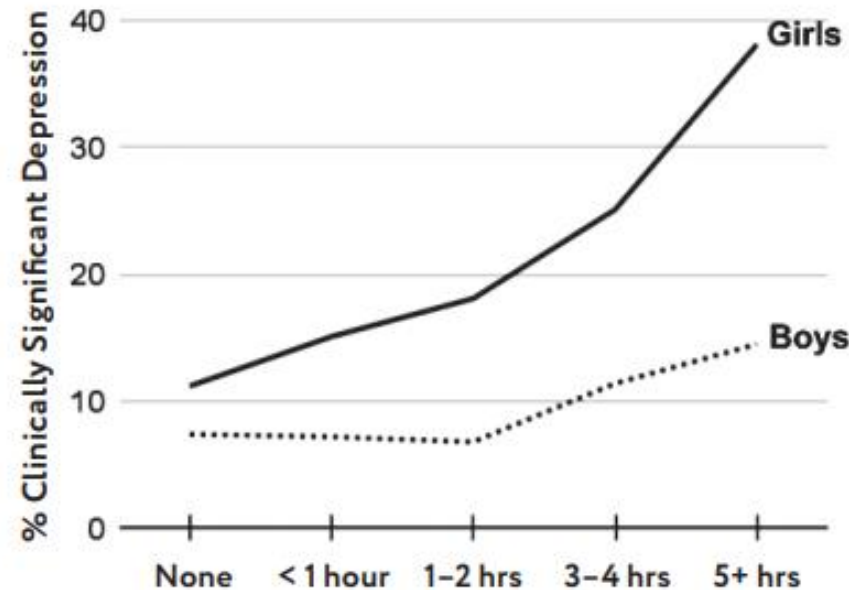


Figure 6.2. Percent of U.K. teens depressed as a function of hours per weekday on social media. Teens who are heavy users of social media are more depressed than light users and nonusers, and this is especially true for girls. (Source: Millennium Cohort Study.)¹¹

Chapter 6 – Why Social Media Harms Girls More Than Boys



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*.¹

Chapter 6 – Why Social Media Harms Girls More Than Boys

Satisfied with Oneself

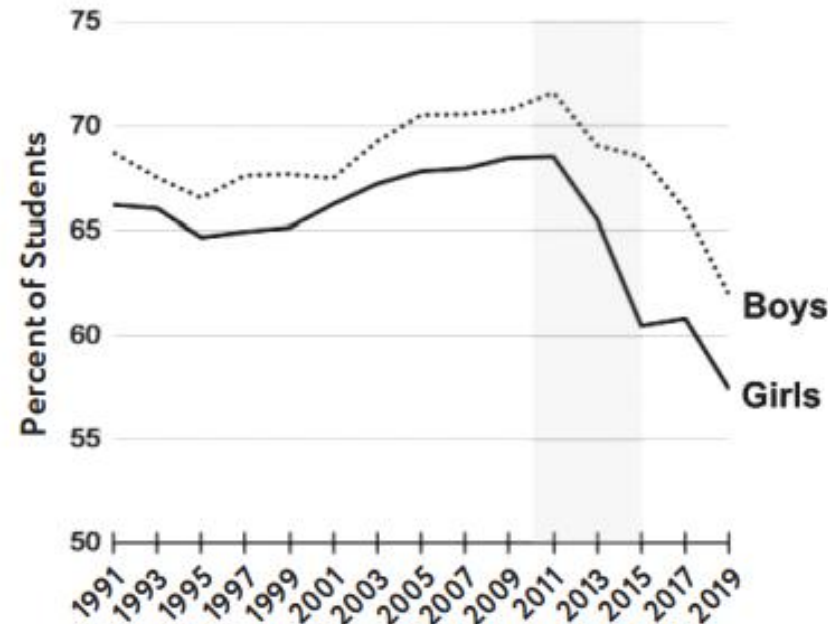


Figure 6.5. The sociometer plunge of 2012. Percent of U.S. students (8th, 10th, and 12th grade) who said they were satisfied with themselves. (Source: Monitoring the Future.)

Chapter 7 – What Is Happening to Boys?

Daily Porn Users, Swedish 12th Graders

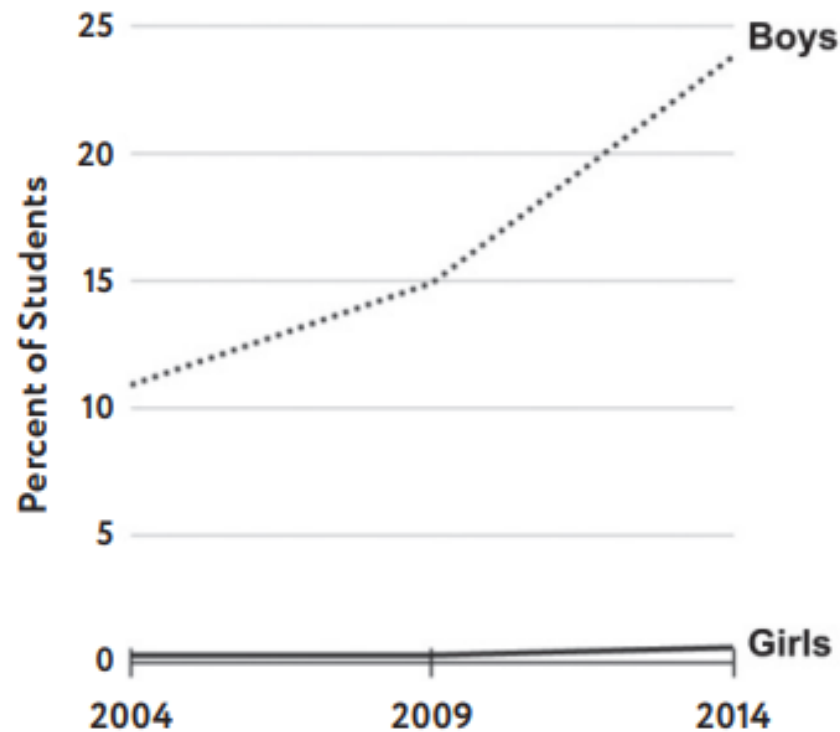


Figure 7.5. Percent of Swedish 12th graders who watch pornography “more or less daily.” (Source: Donevan et al., 2022.)³⁶

Chapter 12 – What Parents Can Do Now

- No smart phones before high school
- No social media until 16
- Phone-free schools
- Far more unsupervised play and childhood independence
- Install internet filters/safety settings
- More nature
- Drastically reduce screen time