

# #1555 The Kids Are Not Alright (Boys, Girls, Culture and Social Media)

## Intro 4-26-23

[00:00:00]

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of the Left Podcast*, in which we shall take a look at some of the trials and tribulations facing the youth today, as men and boys are being surpassed academically by women and girls, while girls are suffering disproportionately under the weight of the toxic forces of social media.

Clips today are from *Axios*, *Big Think*, *The Man Enough Podcast*, the *PBS NewsHour*, the *Diary of a CEO*, *Keep Talking*, and *Your Undivided Attention*, with additional members-only clips from *Your Undivided Attention* and *Big Think*.

And just a note before we start; this is a conversation that is just emerging on the left, and so some of the ideas presented are by definition, new and untested, and they should probably be met with skepticism and debate before being implemented or just really jumping on that bandwagon. So, not all ideas shared today have my personal endorsement and should not be seen [00:01:00] as having it, but they are worth hearing, I think.

Also I would point out that this is a topic that is not being ignored by the far right. They are gearing up to make this their next culture war issue, and they have answers for our youth that is antithetical to most progressive values. So this is a discussion that we ignore at our own peril.

Senator Josh Hawley of Missouri is looking to position himself as a leader in this war, so we'll start with a short clip from him speaking with *Axios* in 2021 to get a feel of their framing before moving on to some attempts to address this topic in more progressive terms.

# Senator Josh Hawley on masculinity - Axios on HBO - Air Date 11-7-21

**MIKE ALLEN - AXIOS:** Senator, you gave a pretty hot speech at the National Conservatism Conference in Orlando. You talked about the left's attack on men of America. Why masculinity as your new big issue?

**SEN. JOSH HAWLEY:** Well, I think what the left is doing is attacking America. They're saying that America's systemically oppressive and men are [00:02:00] systemically responsible.

**MIKE ALLEN - AXIOS:** What's a man to you? Paint a picture.

**SEN. JOSH HAWLEY:** What's a man? Well, a man is a father. A man is a husband. A man is somebody who takes responsibility. As conservatives, we've gotta call men back to responsibility.

We've gotta say that spending your time not working, and we have more and more men who are not working, spending your time on video games, spending your time watching porn online while doing nothing is not good for you, your family, or this country.

**MIKE ALLEN - AXIOS:** So viewers watching in this and they're thinking, really? What the liberals are doing, are gonna push me to watch Pornhub more or play Donkey Kong more? Do you mean that literally?

**SEN. JOSH HAWLEY:** What I mean literally is that I think the liberal attack, the left wing attack on manhood says to men, you're part of the problem.

It says that your masculinity is inherently problematic. It's inherently oppressive.

**MIKE ALLEN - AXIOS:** What's your basis for licking that to what liberals or the left is, you would say, do? Is that based on data or based on a hunch?

**SEN. JOSH HAWLEY:** It's policy over many years. If you look at the policy of de-industrialization, those are policy choices Mike, pursued over many years.

**MIKE ALLEN - AXIOS:** Wait, how [00:03:00] does that connect to porn?

**SEN. JOSH HAWLEY:** Well you've got men, 16 million men who are idle, who don't have anything to do. Now, partly that's their own responsibility, but also partly it's because jobs have dried up in many cities across America, and rural areas too.

I think you put together lack of jobs, you put together fatherlessness, you put together the social messages that we teach our kids in school, think we've gotta confront that and its effects.

## **Male inequality, explained by an expert Richard Reeves Part 2 - Big Think - Air Date 1-4-23**

**RICHARD REEVES:** most men today earn less than most men did in 1979. In employment, with a drop in labor force participation of eight percentage points, which means 9 million men now of prime age are not working. We've seen a drop in occupational stature, and so there are now more men working in employment areas which are seen as lower status than they were in the past. And we've also seen a drop in the acquisition of skills, the kinds of skills and education that boys and men need. If boys don't get educated and men don't get skilled, they will struggle in the labor market. And across all of those domains, we've seen a downward turn for men in the last four or five [00:04:00] decades.

And so the way in which social class divides have opened, economic inequality has widened, is really important to understand in the context of gender inequality. If we only focus on gender gaps, then we miss the fact that both men and women at the top have done increasingly well. But that's much less true of everybody else, and especially it's less true of those from lower income backgrounds, working class boys and men and Black boys and men. You see many of those trends are amplified. And so those boys and men are really at the sharpest end of many of the social and economic changes.

On the one hand, we have a huge and successful and laudable effort to get more women into STEM jobs, so science, technology, engineering, and math.

On the other side, we have what I call HEAL jobs, so that's health, education, administration, and literacy -- almost, if you like, the opposite side of the coin to STEM jobs. And that's where a lot of the jobs are coming from.

Health and education alone are huge and growing [00:05:00] sectors in the US. And so by my estimates, for every one job we're gonna create in STEM between now and 2030, we're gonna create three in HEAL jobs. But those jobs are at least as gender segregated as STEM jobs, but in the other direction. And unlike STEM, becoming more so over time. So if you look at the HEAL sector, only 24% of the workers in those sectors are male, and that number is falling.

And in particular sectors, we are seeing a really precipitous drop in the number of men. We have a drop in the number of male teachers. We have a very sharp drop in the number of male psychologists -- that's dropped from 39% male to 29% male in the last decade alone. And among psychologists under the age of 30, only 5% are male.

So we roll that forward and we're going to see psychology becoming essentially almost an all female profession.

So these jobs, which are both crucial, I think, for society, and where it'd be very useful to have more diversity, [00:06:00] are actually becoming more gender segregated.

And so we have absolutely no effort to get more men into HEAL jobs, which is where I think the future lies and where we should be helping men to move.

One of the problems that we face is what I call in the book a "dad deficit." And that can be seen in various different ways. So one in four fathers don't live with their children. If parents split up, they're much more likely to lose contact with their fathers than with their mothers. And so one in three children, if their parents split up, don't see their father at all after a few years, post the separation.

So this fatherlessness is something that's very, very specific. And when four in 10 children are born outside marriage and most children to less educated parents are born outside marriage, then we have to reinvent what it means to be a father. Because right now, men are still being held to an old standard of what it meant to be a successful father, in a world where that is neither possible for many of them, or even desirable. Because what we've [00:07:00] seen is, as women have grown in economic power and economic independence, and of course they're going to choose to be with a man rather than being forced to, as in the old days. This is probably the greatest liberation in human history, honestly, that women can now choose whether to be with a man or not. More than two out of five households in the US now, a woman is the main breadwinner. 40% of American women earn more than the average man. These are huge economic changes and all for the good. But it does pose a really sharp question about what fathers are

for. And until we escape the obsolete model of the breadwinner father, then we will continue to see more and more men being left out of family life.

And the kicker is that boys in families that don't have a father presence suffer much more than girls. And so then what happens is that male disadvantage can become intergenerational. Because if the fathers are struggling and therefore not really involved in their kids' lives, then the boys are the ones [00:08:00] who suffer most, who will then go on to struggle themselves in education and the labor market.

It's clear by now that marriage and social institutions and a sense of purpose matter to men. And so as we've seen these real challenges faced by men in education, work, and family, you're seeing some really difficult and troubling health consequences. And so the so-called deaths of despair from suicide, overdose to alcohol, three times higher among men than among women. Suicide itself: three times higher among men than women, and rising very quickly, especially among middle-aged men and younger men.

So we can see these as symptoms, I think, of a broader malaise, which is what's troubling boys and men. And for men in particular, this sense of purpose is very important. I think it's a human universal that we need to be needed.

There's a wonderful piece of work by an academic called Fiona Shand, who looked at the last words that [00:09:00] men had used to describe themselves before committing suicide or attempting suicide. And the top of the list were "worthless" and "useless."

I think if we create a society in which so many men do feel like they're not needed, then it's no surprise that we see these deaths of despair. We see problems with opioids -- opioids are a much bigger problem for men than they are for women. And one of the great tragedies of opioid deaths is the death rates are higher, in part, because the users are on their own. And so in some ways, the opioid epidemic is a perfect illustration of a whole series of things we are talking about, which is a loss of role in the family, a loss of status in the labor market, turning to drugs, and being isolated and withdrawn.

And so in that example, I think you can see a symptom of this broader male malaise -- that we just need to take it more seriously. And we have a cultural responsibility. As a society, men and women together, to help men and boys to adjust to this new world. Because right now many of them are really struggling.[00:10:00]

# Liz Plank & Richard Reeves Debate Gender Inequality - The Man Enough Podcast - Air Date 4-5-23

**LIZ PLANK:** when you talk about gender inequality in schools and in colleges, right? So we're starting from a position of 50 years ago, not just that women were discouraged from going to college, women weren't even allowed to go to certain colleges. An interview with Bill Maher, where he literally talks about going to college where there were no women.

And this is what bugged me: the language that you used in that moment, in another interview, you said, you're still using gender inequality to define the phenomenon of there being more women in colleges than men. And I don't think that that's the, to me, using gender inequality in that context is like, if there were more Black women who are getting degrees than White women, would that be racial inequality? No.

Is what I'm saying making sense? We wouldn't call that racial inequality.

**RICHARD REEVES:** Yeah.

**LIZ PLANK:** If people of color were doing better in school than White people, we would still talk about it, like there's something going on. But I think using the term "gender inequality" in that context, when it's not that there's laws trying to get men out of [00:11:00] schools or an entire society that's devoted to trying to push them out.

And so is there another language that we should be using that acknowledges that this isn't like a structural discrimination that's happening?

**RICHARD REEVES:** Yeah, well, you're getting into the "why" of the gap. So the data are pretty clear. So just to put the data point on the table, in 1972 when Title IX was passed, men were about 13 percentage points more likely to get a college degree than women. Now women are about 15 percentage points more likely than men to get a college degree. So I'll use the language for now, in the way that you've just criticized, and then defend it. So there's a bigger gender inequality in higher education in the US today than there was in 1972, it's just the other way around.

Now I think that I'm just using gender inequality in a neutral sense there to describe any gap that can be seen between the two genders. So you could get it in life expectancy, for example. But here's another example, the gender pay gap. Do we still want to [00:12:00] measure the gender pay gap? And I think the gender pay gap is neutral. I don't think that the fact of the gender pay gap is in dispute. In fact, it's not in dispute, it's a fact. The question is, why is that happening? And the real argument is, is it because of gender discrimination and patriarchy, or is it because of something else? Occupational choice? Child rearing? Whatever.

But I don't think the fact of describing a gender inequality in wages is anything other than a fact. And I would say the same about a gender inequality in education. And just cuz it goes the other way doesn't make it less true. Right?

**LIZ PLANK:** Well, but would you call it racial inequality if we were talking about race, would you choose that terminology? Because I think there is a difference between gender gap and gender inequality. Right? Like that gender inequality -- and again, this is to me -- but that that connotes sexism. Right? That connotes a societal discrimination. And yeah, women being barred from going to college in 1972 is different from men having difficulties though they're admitted in colleges. And again, I'm saying [00:13:00] it's good that we're acknowledging that issue, but to use the same term to describe women not being allowed to go to college and men not doing as well in college, to me is a false equivalency and it obfuscates the way that for women this was the state doing this. This was the government doing this and preventing them from being --

**JAMEY HEATH - CO-HOST, THE MAN ENOUGH PODCAST:** Can I just add something -- and Chris, I know you have some thoughts, I know for sure.

In the work that you do, in all of us, we want people to hear us, right? We don't wanna just say things. The goal is to go into a room and have them hear our thoughts and embrace them whether, they agree or not, but at least consider them.

And if we start with language that sometimes puts up a wall for someone, then I wanna change that language because I want them to hear my message, and not get caught up in the language. I know I can use this word "inequality" to say that there was inequality in baseball with Whites and Blacks because Blacks were left out of sports. Specifically they were oppressed. You cannot come in here, you can't do it. There was an inequality, and we use that term.

You could also use the term "inequality" in basketball [00:14:00] now. Black and White. There's not a lot of White people in it.

But if you use the term, if I use the term there's inequality in basketball, in race, or a White person said that, Black people are gonna be like, what do you mean there's inequality?

**CHRIS CORCORAN - EXEC. PRODUCER, MAN ENOUGH PODCAST:** Oh, Black people get wild. Yeah. "What do you mean inequality?"

**JAMEY HEATH - CO-HOST, THE MAN ENOUGH PODCAST:** Because White people are not being told they can't come in it because of their race, they're not being oppressed. The reason is, as you had said, there's a reason for it, but that word inequality elicits so much.

**CHRIS CORCORAN - EXEC. PRODUCER, MAN ENOUGH PODCAST:** It's in our blood, it's in our marrow. Like so much has been unequal for so long. So much oppression has taken place towards women, towards bodies of culture, that as soon as the oppressor says there's inequality now, it's like, well, watch it. What? Watch it.

**JAMEY HEATH - CO-HOST, THE MAN ENOUGH PODCAST:** I think it's important to use, if I want to make the point to someone to hear it, it is important the terms that we use so that it can then be heard and I would be like, oh, don't use the word "inequality" when we're talking about the basketball makeup. I would be like, there's a gap between Black and White people. Or there is a disparity in races in it. It doesn't then elicit emotion that I'm gonna now get defensive over it.

And [00:15:00] I hear that's what Liz, when you say that, there's so much to it. So I think there was a learning I just had in there that we can say the same thing and just reframe our words.

**LIZ PLANK:** And I think that we come up with better solutions when we're able to really use the right language to label the problem.

And this is the fear that I have where people are hearing, "gender inequality now," and it's like, well now men are the ones who are oppressed. And doing equivocation with the way that women were prevented from being in college is different from what's going on. There are two problems that are worthy of being addressed equally, but the source of the problem is different.



**RICHARD REEVES:** This is an incredibly good example of the value of this kind of exchange because this is literally a point that has never been made to me before. And I'm sitting here thinking about it and thinking, I think I'm using the word "inequality" in a neutral way, right? Like "gap." But what is heard is that inequality is related in an important way to an injustice.

**CHRIS CORCORAN - EXEC. PRODUCER, MAN ENOUGH PODCAST:** Correct.

**LIZ PLANK:** Right.

**RICHARD REEVES:** [00:16:00] And so by using the language of inequality, you imply, you infer an injustice. And that obviously gets people's backs up if you're suddenly talking about the gender inequality for boys and men in education, because that's not the result of an injustice. Whereas previous gender inequality, the other way, was.

And so I need to sit with this for a little bit longer, but it's incredibly useful for me just to have heard that, Liz, and to know that that word "inequality" is being received differently to the way that I mean it, and that might help me to improve my communication.

So I'm really grateful for that.

## **Teenage girls experiencing record high levels of sadness, violence and trauma, CDC says - PBS Newshour - Air Date 2-20-23**

**STEPHANIE SY - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** the CDC has been conducting this survey every couple years for three decades. This new report is the first to measure the wellbeing of the nation's youth since the pandemic started. In 2021, the CDC saw an increase of mental health challenges across the board, but as one official said: it's girls in the US that are engulfed in a growing wave of sadness, violence, and trauma. [00:17:00]

Nearly three in five teen girls reported feeling persistent sadness and hopelessness, double the rate of boys. 25% of girls reported having made a suicide plan, and 14% reported having been forced to have sex. A 4% rise since the last survey.

What's more, 22% of teenagers that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning have attempted suicide in the past year. For a look at how we got here and what can be done, I'm joined by Sharon Hoover, co-director of the National Center for School Mental Health, and Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

Sharon Hoover, thanks for joining the News Air. I wanna jump right in because there's so many topics. The decline of youth mental health goes back at least a decade, but the numbers of girls reporting how much they're suffering really stands out in this report. Why do things seem to be getting worse for teen girls?

**SHARON HOOVER:** That's right. I have to say we are not [00:18:00] surprised to see increases in mental health challenges. We have seen these trends happening for the past. Several years, as you said, but it was quite surprising in some respects to see the stark gender difference that we saw. And as you said, this is the first national look that we've had since the pandemic.

And so it gives us a bit of insight into maybe how boys and girls and different folks have experienced the pandemic differently.

**STEPHANIE SY - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Why are we looking at this gender gap? Why are girls suffering so

**SHARON HOOVER:** much? There's a lot of speculation right now that we've seen this stark difference between girls and boys.

One of the hypotheses is that girls were more socially isolated and may rely more on their peers for self-confidence, for self-esteem. For just their general wellbeing. And they also, men been, have more likely to actually spend time on social media and not just spend time on it, but time that is excessive and may reach the threshold of making them at greater [00:19:00] risk for anxiety and depression.

**STEPHANIE SY - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** The CDC Sharon says, schools are on the frontline of this crisis, and that's your area of expertise. What is the role of schools in addressing hopelessness, and are they equipped for that task?

**SHARON HOOVER:** So I was pleased to see the CDC come out and say that schools need to be a really critical part of how we address this.

Many of us have said that we can't simply treat our way out of this youth mental health crisis. There's not enough providers, and it really isn't the right approach. I often talk about how, if we saw 60% of our young people being injured in car accidents, the solution would not be to simply hire more physicians in the emergency department.

Rather, we would take a public health approach. We would take a look at how can we better equip cars, how can we look at the driving age? Similarly, we really need to be taking a public health approach to what's happening with our young people, and one of the most essential places to do that is in schools.

The CDC has long said that [00:20:00] we need to be looking at efforts to promote school connectedness and belongingness. When we actually make a concerted effort and investment in those types of positive youth development approaches, we actually see improvements in school connectedness, and impact on youth mental health.

I absolutely think it's the right way to go in terms of the fix here, or at least one part of the resolution to this.

**STEPHANIE SY - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** I wanna come back to what was most startling to me about this report, which is that 14% of teenage girls report being forced to have sex. That they are experiencing rape and violence at much higher rates.

Those things would obviously impact mental health, but shouldn't the headline be; *girls are being targeted and raped at alarming rates and what is being done about the perpetrators of such crimes?* It was odd to me to see that grouped in with mental health challenges.

**SHARON HOOVER:** Well, we know the two are related.

Of course, as you said, if you're experiencing sexual assault, you're [00:21:00] at much greater risk for mental health challenges. Absolutely there needs to be a headline just calling out what's happening to our young girls. We've seen a dramatic increase in their self-reported incidents of sexual assault.

It is startling, the numbers are really concerning. There are measures that can be put in place. Many of those at the school level, to help our young people navigate relationships, and to really prevent some of the sexual assault that we're seeing. The numbers are striking.

**STEPHANIE SY - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Finally, this CDC report enforces previous research that has shown how lesbian, gay and questioning youth are reporting substantially worse wellbeing. Including also being more likely to experience violence.

Given how there are school boards that are literally fighting over gender identity curriculum, are they even less likely to get their mental health needs met today?

**SHARON HOOVER:** It's one of our greatest worries that some of the controversy in some of the legislation, [00:22:00] and just discussion even at the school board level, about making our environments and our schools less inclusive for LGBTQ+ youth, could really negatively impact this group of students who are already vulnerable.

We know that LGBTQ youth are much more at risk of suicidality, of depression and anxiety. We also know that there are solutions that can be put in place to help them with not only getting mental health supports, but also at a more public health level to really make schools a more inclusive, accepting place where they can feel that they belong.

We're very concerned about some of the legislation that we're seeing, some of the actions by school boards to make their schools less inclusive. Which we feel, and the data would support, puts them at greater risk of mental health concerns.

## **The Number One Reason This Generation Is Struggling | Scott Galloway Part 1 - The Diary of a CEO - Air Date 10-27-22**

**SCOTT GALLOWAY:** So I think what you have is a generation of young men that have no motivation, no guardrails. They get their dopamine hit of addiction on Robinhood. They don't have the mojo to get out there and meet women as much cuz they're [00:23:00] watching so much porn. They get this illusion that they have some sort of worth or affirmation when they say angry things on social media that they get rewarded for. They start blaming other people specifically, they start blaming women and they become much more prone to misogynistic content. They start believing in conspiracy theory. They're less likely to believe in climate change. And some, they become just really shitty citizens.

And we're producing just a massive amount of these individuals, and the scary part is, We'll just ignore the weirdo and put them in the corner. The problem is the government doesn't ignore them because we're very misogynistic when it comes to our elected leaders. In the US we've been producing more female college graduates than male college graduates for the last 40 years, but still, only 28% of our elected representatives are female.

People, societies, men and women, conflate leadership quality with height and depth of voice. So we will always, at least in the US for a long time, elect more men. And who do these men appeal to? How do they get elected? They appeal to this [00:24:00] cohort of conspiracy driven, misogynistic, anti-government young men. These young men will always have overrepresentation in government, which leads to elected leaders saying that they believe the elections are rigged. They stoke nationalist fears that blame immigrants. I mean really, really hateful stuff, and so not only are these individuals dangerous and unproductive, but what's even more unproductive is they will have a disproportionate voice in our politics, cuz the easiest way to get elected is to tap into the tribal instincts or motives of this cohort. You

**STEVEN BUTLER - HOST, DIARY OF A CEO:** said misogynistic content there, and one of the things that came to mind when you said that was Andy Tate. Are you familiar with this person? Is Andrew Tate's message a symptom of what you've described?

**SCOTT GALLOWAY:** A hundred percent. It's easy to credit your grit and your character for your successes and blame the markets for your failures, and so when you have a young man who is failing, he's looking for culprits and [00:25:00] then you have someone come along and say, it's not your fault, and they start saying that the reason you can't find a date, it's women's fault. It's their fault, it's not yours. It's not that you haven't developed the skills or demonstrated the discipline to develop the attributes that others find attractive, it's their fault.

And I think it's very dangerous and most of it's a gift. The individual you represented claims it's not your fault, but by my \$49.95 "learn how to be successful program", it really is a gift. Trump is sort of a version of that. If you think about what's happening in America, the Democratic Party is basically becoming the party of educated women and the Republican party is becoming the party uneducated men. I think that those types of individuals are perfect examples of falling into this really ugly "blame others" gestalt in our society. I think it's very unfortunate.

I think we also—I have no idea what your politics are, Steve, if I consider myself a progressive—I think progressives have to take back masculinity, and that is, [00:26:00] we have to define what masculinity means and show a vision. Why are all the dudes these conservatives? I'll give you an example. I'm a profane and vulgar person, and on the left, they immediately complain, conflate. I've cursed several times on this show. I talk about sex very openly and very crudely. That doesn't mean I'm not a feminist, doesn't mean I don't have progressive values. So I think the left needs to take back profanity and vulgarity, and I think we need to take back masculinity.

I see masculinity as a man-made societal construct, but we need to identify it, and then ask young men to foot to those skills. And I see in a very basic way, acquiring the skills and strengths so you can advocate for and protect others, whether it's physical strength, mental strength, financial strength, kindness, intelligence.

And I think saying, "okay, it's great to be a man, express your masculinity." And by the way, masculinity isn't just the domain of people who are born men. Women can demonstrate masculine features just as men can demonstrate feminine features. But I think the left, or [00:27:00] progressives, need to take back this notion of masculinity. And we've sort of emasculated on the left men, because to be pro man, to even acknowledge masculinity, is somehow to be anti female on the left, and that's not true at all. You know who wants more men, women—or that's what I find.

So I think that a key to restoring balance, if you will, and not having our parties split across gender lines and pull this generation of failing young men out of this hole is to redefine masculinity as something more evolved, more thoughtful, that involves intelligence, that involves kindness, that involves strength, but also on the left to say it's okay to be a man. We can acknowledge our differences. It's okay to be aggressive. When Russians pour over the border in Ukraine, you want some of that big dick energy. There's some features distinct to men that is really important in our society and should be celebrated. And all of it has been, in my opinion, not all of it, a lot of it has been on the left conflated with [00:28:00] toxicity. And there's some of those attributes that can lead to terrible behavior. But most of it is a good thing in our society, most of it is needed.

**What the Andrew Tate phenomenon reveals about our society Richard Reeves - Keep Talking - Air Date 11-13-22**

**RICHARD REEVES:** Enter Andrew Tate. He is basically making people nostalgic for Peterson in the same way that people got nostalgic for George W. Bush as soon as Trump got elected. He's tapping into a similar well, but I think in a much more invidious way. What they're seeing is someone is like, "here I am and here I stand, this is why I believe and I don't care what anyone else thinks," and I was actually watching an Andrew Tate video with a young woman and a couple of young men, and she said, he seems very confident. Yes, he does—to a degree that's troubling in many cases.

I think it's incumbent to understand his appeal, and not to dismiss everyone who's attracted to him as just straightforwardly misogynist, but instead trying to say, "what is it here? What's missing here?" Because there's something missing in our society that is allowing people like Andrew Tate to get 12 billion views. And so to that extent, I think Andrew Tate is our fault. [00:29:00] I don't blame Tate, I blame us.

## **Social media companies face legal scrutiny over deteriorating mental health among teens - PBS Newshour - Air Date 2-14-23**

**CHRISTOPHER BOOKER - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** for Nuala Mullen, it started when she was 10 years old, posting videos like this one to social media. Two years later, she joined Instagram. The next year, TikTok.

**NUALA MULLEN:** It's just an addiction. Once you know what it feels like to get likes and validation, you just crave it all of the time.

[Dancing to music] Back in the sixth grade, I got some bad grades/I was in love...

**CHRISTOPHER BOOKER - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** And over the next five years, she gained thousands of followers documenting her teenage life.

**NUALA MULLEN:** It's like I knew that I was hurting myself and I knew what I was doing wasn't beneficial to me. But I just needed that validation so badly that I was willing to do anything to get it.

**CHRISTOPHER BOOKER - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Mullen, who is now 18, says that became especially true at the start of the pandemic.

Then a star field hockey player at her high school in Westchester County, New York, Mullen says she started doing popular workout challenges on TikTok and Instagram while stuck at home.

**NUALA MULLEN:** I think that's really how I fell down the rabbit hole, because I was noticing, after this two weeks, the changes, and I was [00:30:00] getting comments on TikTok being like, oh, you look so good, whatever. And I thought to myself, oh, something must be working, you know.

**CHRISTOPHER BOOKER - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Almost immediately, Mullen says her Instagram and TikTok feeds were flooded with body image content, from workout challenges to diet tips to testimonials on how to lose and keep off weight.

Before long, she had developed a new routine, one that continued even after she went back to school.

**NUALA MULLEN:** Well, I'd go to field hockey practice, come home, I would run for an hour. I would do weight training. I would do ab routines. I would do HITT workout videos, basically until I was too weak to do anything else. I was training for hours and hours and throughout the day I wasn't eating then.

**ELIZABETH MULLEN:** I had no idea who she was. It was like another person took over her body.

**CHRISTOPHER BOOKER - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Nuala's mom, Elizabeth Mullen, says she and her daughter have always been close. But as Nuala became obsessed with working out, she struggled to understand what was fueling this new behavior.

**ELIZABETH MULLEN:** You [00:31:00] know, she would talk about a feeling of not being good enough, of being lonely at times, not being seen. I was like, well, what's happening here? And then I started to really take a look into what she was seeing on the phone.

**CHRISTOPHER BOOKER - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** What was it like for you as a parent to first try to understand what was happening and then, by extension, try to get control over what was happening?

**ELIZABETH MULLEN:** At its worst, it's like dropping your boat's anchor in the middle of a hurricane at sea. Like it is just impossible. Because I'd get on



and I'd be like, well, what's this about? And or Why do you have to photograph yourself like that?

And so, what ended up happening is, she's a smart girl. She would just create different accounts.

**CHRISTOPHER BOOKER - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** By the fall of 2021, Nuala's life began to spiral. Diagnosed with anorexia, she began having chest pains and was hospitalized after her heart rate became dangerously low.

**NUALA MULLEN:** For me, I couldn't get skinny enough. I couldn't receive enough likes, that I was just still in that mindset that I needed to be skinny in order for these people online to like [00:32:00] me.

**CHRISTOPHER BOOKER - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** What about peers and friends? Did you have conversations with them later about what had happened?

**NUALA MULLEN:** Not till after my second hospitalization. I found that, even like during the eating disorder, I didn't wanna tell anyone, not even in the sense that I was embarrassed, but it was competitive for me. I thought, oh, if I shared that I had anorexia with one of my friends, they might get a notion and they might become skinnier than me and they might get more likes. So I wouldn't tell anyone what was going on.

**CHRISTOPHER BOOKER - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** In December, the Mullens filed a lawsuit against both TikTok and Meta, the parent company that owns Instagram and Facebook, alleging that the addictive qualities of these platforms are causing and contributing to the burgeoning mental health crisis for teenagers.

It's one of hundreds of lawsuits against social media companies that come as the industry faces increasing calls for reform, including from President Joe Biden earlier this month.

**PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN:** We must finally hold social media companies accountable for experimenting or doing running children for profit.

**CHRISTOPHER BOOKER - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Social [00:33:00] media companies have long been shielded from lawsuits because of what's known as Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, a 1996 law

that protected the companies from what users post on their platforms. But the Supreme Court will consider challenges to the law later this month.

**IMRAN AHMED:** Right now, platforms have no responsibility for how their businesses cause harm.

**CHRISTOPHER BOOKER - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Imran Ahmed is the CEO of the nonprofit Center for Countering Digital Hate. In their recent report titled "Deadly By Design," the organization calculated that videos related to eating disorders on TikTok had been viewed more than 13 billion times.

The organization also set up eight TikTok accounts, all posing as 13 year olds, the minimum age allowed by law to be on social media. After these accounts briefly viewed or liked body image and mental health content, more was quickly fed to them.

**IMRAN AHMED:** Within two and a half minutes of opening an account as a 13 year old girl it's sending it self-harm content. Within eight minutes, eating [00:34:00] disorder content. Every 39 seconds, a first half hour, they were receiving some sort of harmful content.

**CHRISTOPHER BOOKER - REPORTER, PBS NEWSHOUR:** Both TikTok and Meta declined the NewsHour request for an interview. But a TikTok spokesperson told us that last year the company proactively removed more than 80% of all eating disorder content within 24 hours, and more than 70% of those videos received no views; while Meta told the NewsHour, "We want teens to be safe online." And "We don't allow content that promotes suicide, self-harm, or eating disorders."

The statement goes on to say, "of the content we remove... we identify 99% of it before it's reported to us."

**JOHNATHAN HAIDT:** If you get users when they're young, there's a good chance they'll stay on for life. Everybody's competing for the teenagers.

**Are the Kids Alright — with Jonathan Haidt Part 1 - Your Undivided Attention - Air Date 10-27-20**

**JOHNATHAN HAIDT:** when Greg and I wrote an article in *The Atlantic* in 2015, which the editors titled *The Coddling of the American Mind*, we didn't like the title, but it sure stuck. So that got us into studying what is happening to college students?

They have rising rates of depression. Why is that? [00:35:00] So that's what that article was about. We thought that there are ways of thinking that are very harmful, that are self-destructive, that encourage people to think of themselves as victims. We speculated — we had one line in the article about how college students who arrived in campus around 2014 were also the first generation to really get on Facebook, and other social media around the time it came out. Around 2007, 2008, they were in middle school.

We speculate maybe that had something to do with it, but there was no evidence back then. In the couple years after that, what Greg and I learned is that one of the biggest things that happened on college campuses, is that Gen Z arrived around 2014. So the millennials are not really more depressed than previous generations, but suddenly kids born in 1996 and later are very different from the millennials.

Jean Twenge, who's been studying generations for a while now, she comes out with a big article in the *Atlantic* called *Are Smartphones Ruining a Generation?* She reviews the [00:36:00] evidence that, actually yes, the smartphone generation — growing up on smartphones does seem to impact mental health. That was 2017, and she has a book called *iGen*.

When Greg and I read that, it was a big missing piece of the puzzle. For me, this has been a really gigantic puzzle with enormous social ramifications. Twenge's research, at least, suggested that a piece of the puzzle is social media, and another piece is the overprotection. Which is what Greg and I had been focusing on.

So that's what got me started.

**TRISTAN HARRIS - HOST, YOUR UNDIVIDED ATTENTION:** I think it's important for people to know, in your book, you are not coming from a background of, "We really have to care about kids, they're all so vulnerable. We have to make sure we're coddling them." At the point of your book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, is that we've been overprotective.

Just a name for people as we start to veer into the territory of; how do we deal with, and protect, or care about the mental health of especially teenage girls?

This isn't starting from a perspective of; we need to be so delicate, they're so delicate, we have to be so careful with them. Do you wanna talk just a little bit more about that side? Because I think it qualifies that your [00:37:00] concern would be so opposite when it comes to social media teen girls.

**JOHNATHAN HAIDT:** That's right because the core psychological idea, the most important psychological idea in the book, is anti-fragility. It's such a useful idea and everybody knows it. We all understand that the immune system is an open system that requires exposure to pathogens in order to develop immunity. That's how a vaccine works.

Most people understand that if you raise your kid in a bubble because you're afraid of bacteria, and so you never let the kid be exposed to bacteria, that doesn't help. We need to be exposed to bacteria. Psychologically speaking, if you protect your kid and you say, "I'll make sure you never get lost, I'll make sure that you're never teased or threatened by other kids," you're not helping the kid.

Obviously bullying that goes on for days is terrible, but kids have to have normal conflicts to get lost, to get scared sometimes, and then you find your way back. We need this, kids must have a lot of negative experiences to develop normal strength and toughness. So I start from that position that we do need to [00:38:00] let kids out.

We need to let them have all kinds of negative experiences, and not protect them. Then they learn to protect themselves. So there's gonna be interesting twist when we get to the question of; shouldn't they be out on social media being publicly shamed? Wouldn't that be good for them? But we're getting ahead of the story.

Let's put right on the table here, what do we mean by social media and why is it sometimes bad? Let's be clear, obviously social media does enormous good. Facebook in particular, is very good at getting groups to organize and do things. I would never want to do a blanket thing like; social media is terrible, or the internet is terrible.

Let's be clear about what are the mechanisms here that make a little part of what we do online harmful, both to democracy, and to teen mental health? Writing this article in The Atlantic last fall with Tobias Rose Stockwell, who knows a lot more about social media than I do, what I learned — what I really began to see in the evolution here; is that when social media began, Friendster, MySpace, the Facebook, they were just like glorified address books.

Look! Here's me, look at all [00:39:00] the friends I have, look at all the bands I like. That's not toxic, that's just public display, and you're boasting what your popularity. That's not bad for democracy, and that doesn't drive people to suicide. The big change, the period where everything got transformed is 2009 to 2012 or 13.

In 2009, Facebook adds the Like button, and then Twitter copies it. Twitter adds the retweet button, and then Facebook copies it. Now the platforms have enormous amounts of information about what people will click on, what engages them. Now they algorithmize their news feeds, and suddenly now everything's custom tailored to you to maximize the degree to which you will stay on, you will click, you will forward something.

The net effect is that by — first of all, for the teen mental health; in 2009 most teens were not on these platforms every day, by 2011 they were. That's the two year period where teen social life goes from mostly [00:40:00] face-to-face, they're texting a lot, it's not — like the old days.

These platforms where you create content, other people rate your content, other people like it or ignore it. Then you look, and you're watching the meter go up or not, and you're feeling shame because your post didn't get many likes. This is when everything changes, 2009 to 2011.

That's the transformative period for teen mental health and also for democracy. By 20 11, 20 12, we've now created, what Tobias calls, the outrage machine. We have the ability now for anything to happen and anybody, an individual or an organization, can distort it. Repackage it in a way that triggers outrage, retweet it, and then it can go viral very quickly.

Now we're in a state of perpetual outrage. This is not about forming a group of dog walkers in a neighborhood. This is about a way of engaging that maximizes public [00:41:00] performance. Which means we all become brand managers trying to manipulate other people, in a way linked together, so that things can move very quickly, and we can all be immersed in outrage forever and ever.

The world changed between 2009 and 2011, 12. Then mainstream media now has no choice but to hook into this. So this is the key period that people need to focus on.

# The Number One Reason This Generation Is Struggling | Scott Galloway Part 2 - The Diary of a CEO - Air Date 10-27-22

**SCOTT GALLOWAY:** It's especially prevalent among kids. The lack of socialization and then this kind of hyper-socialization that takes place on their phone, which is really brutal and has huge externalities, is I think one of the biggest causes for the massive uptick in depression among young people. So again, I like to coach younger people, I'm like, put yourself in a position where you have to be around other people every day, building something in the agency of something else, whether it's a job, whether it's a nonprofit, whether it's church, whether it's a [00:42:00] sports league. Be in the agency of others, building something bigger than all of you. And it's a great way to make friends, mentors. It's a great way to learn how to read the room.

I joined a fraternity when I went to UCLA when I was 17, and people make a cartoon of fraternity, like we're all these terrible people. It was the best thing I could have done. I had no male role models until the age of 17. My dad wasn't around. I didn't have many friends. So being in a place that shrunk a 30,000 person campus down to a smaller thing, I wouldn't have graduated. And it was hard for me. My "fraternity brothers" gave me a hard time, but it was really good for me. You get in better shape. I remember my roommates telling me to stop smoking so much pot and go to class more. I mean, you have people watching you 24/7. I needed that socialization. So I think one of the worst things that can happen to a young adult is for them to be isolated and we're increasingly isolated.

**STEVEN BUTLER - HOST, DIARY OF A CEO:** Are you optimistic about that, that changing because the direction of travel is in one direction, and then when you hear things about metaverses and...

**SCOTT GALLOWAY:** I'm not. [00:43:00] I think technology is nihilistic, I think the most successful person in the world, at least monetarily, wants to figure out a way to inhabit another planet rather than focus his genius and his resources on making this planet more habitable, and I find that nihilistic. I just find it strange that the most talented, wealthiest people in the world want to get us off the planet. And then you think about social media, just the trends among young people, there's an uptick in travel, but that's pent up demand by class people who have the money to travel.

Our socialization appears to have taken a dramatic step change, structural step change down, and I even see to my kids. They are thinking about getting home to their phones and they're social on their phones, but it's not a replacement for person to person contact. There's some good things to it. Teen drunk driving accidents are down, teen pregnancy is way down, but the number of kids socializing is way off. I think it's a terrible thing and I don't see there'll be some uptick because [00:44:00] COVID's is over, but it feels like there's been a structural step change down cuz people now want the dopa[mine], they get trading on Robinhood, watching porn, watching Netflix, getting some sort of socialization or need for affirmation by the number of likes to get on Twitter, rather than leaving their house to get that same type of dopa[mine] hit.

The number of people playing and organized sports is way down. I think it's a real problem, and I don't see it, unless there's ex, unless there's recognition of it, an external investment, whether it's youth clubs, whether it's after school programs, whether it's some sort of conscription or national service—which I'm a big fan of—I don't see structured means for people, young people, to serve in the agency of something bigger than themselves.

**STEVEN BUTLER - HOST, DIARY OF A CEO:** Do you think there's a decline in grit amongst young people that this Gen Z generation in the western world, when you think about your kids and the grit, they'll have, you talked about how important grit is to, to achieving economic viability.

I was talking to Simon Cynic about this a couple of weeks ago on this podcast about whether Gen Z are less [00:45:00] resilient and hardworking than generations that have come before them because of the influences. I remember I opened up TikTok the other day and it's showing, I dunno whether this was just the TikTok I saw, I remember one going viral on Twitter a couple of weeks ago from San Francisco showing the day in the life of a Gen Z working in tech, and it's like, wake up, go get the frappa chapa latte, whatever.

**SCOTT GALLOWAY:** Take the dog for a walk.

**STEVEN BUTLER - HOST, DIARY OF A CEO:** Take the dog for a pottery class. It's like five minutes on the laptop...pottery glasses.

**SCOTT GALLOWAY:** Yoga. I worry about this a lot with my kids because, generally speaking, what happens is the children of,... I always say if I had what my kids have, I wouldn't have what I have because I wasn't that motivated. If I'd grown up in a household my kids are growing up now, the only two things I know I would've had in my life as a young man are a Range Rover and a

cocaine habit. An absence of money really motivated me. And my kids don't have that. My kids have access to everything they need, and so trying to figure out a way to instill grit in your kids, whether it's chores [00:46:00] or some level of discipline, I think it's my biggest challenge as a, or our biggest challenge as parents.

But in terms of the... I work with, and granted it's selection bias, the kids I work with, I can't get over how extraordinarily talented they are. So the meme of "quiet quitting", and again, it may be proximity bias because of the kids I draw or I know in my firm, but I find that every year, and I teach between three and 500 kids a year at NYU, every year I find that the kids, the young adults are more talented and harder working and more socially conscious.

Sure, they're a little expectant. Some of it I roll my eyes. Occasionally I'll [hear] someone say "I need to leave and go to Pilates class", and I kind of laugh. Like, I can't even imagine saying that to my boss when I started out, but in general I find they're just remarkable. And again, it might be cuz of the kids I've been able to attract, but I don't buy this notion that they're somehow entitled.

I haven't seen that.

## **Are the Kids Alright — with Jonathan Haidt Part 2 - Your Undivided Attention - Air Date 10-27-20**

**JOHNATHAN HAIDT:** Amy Orbin has been, I think, really good on this. She's had a lot of articles [00:47:00] saying "stop talking about screen time", and she actually has convinced me about that in my debate with her. Now, screen time still matters overall in the sense that parents need to decide and kids need to decide, do you wanna spend all day on your screen? But, if we're talking about "does screen time cause depression or anxiety?", no, it looks like it doesn't. So if we just focus on depression/anxiety, I think we are honing in on the idea that screen time is not the problem, but social media is. We're not accusing all screen time activities, we're actually now focusing on, "we think this is the guy that did it". So, it's not resolved, but I think we got.

**TRISTAN HARRIS - HOST, YOUR UNDIVIDED ATTENTION:** So we've gone through the detective story with these statistical models, but the content that's beneath the word "social media" is different for each application, and on a given day and in a given year. Are we talking about Facebook? Are we talking



about Instagram? Are we talking about TikTok? Are we talking about Facebook in 2009, third quarter, where they change the algorithm and all the weights are different? I think what's really hard about this is how do we move the debate and that conversation to a common sense [00:48:00] orientation of, okay, if I'm a 12 year old kid, I'm forming my identity from a teenage girl and I'm especially attuned to my physical appearance, and I post a photo and I don't use a filter on it. And I see that the photo that doesn't have as much of my skin showing doesn't get as many likes as when I used to have a lot more skin showing. I actually will delete that—this is a known behavior—the teenage girl will delete the photo that doesn't get very many likes cuz she's worried about how she'll be perceived given all of her other ones have this high social rating.

And so of basic mechanics, it's almost like saying, well, with climate change we could do a million statistical models or we can just look at the mechanism that says, "this tends to amplify that". And I'm curious, John, when you think about that, because there's so many nuances of what we could say here. Obviously people will say things like, "but look at all the creative things that people are doing on TikTok. Look at all these amazing videos", but we can look at key mechanics and at content beneath the word social and media that I think we can clearly say are harmful. What do you think about that?

**JOHNATHAN HAIDT:** Yeah, so Nir Eyal, he wrote the book [00:49:00] *Hooked*, he and actually became friends during a debate over whether social media is harmful—we have daughters the same age who became friends. But Nir has this thing she calls the regret test. And if you ask consumers do they regret their involvement with the product, and they say yes, well that's pretty damning. The whole moral basis of capitalism is that it creates wealth and allocates resources in ways that satisfy people's wants, and if it's doing things that people don't want, or, you know, catching them up in behaviors that they wish they didn't have, well that's pretty damning.

There was a study done on users of Moment, and it was one was the percentage of users who are happy with the amount of time they spend on each app. And at the top, the most happy, in order is: FaceTime, Mail, Phone, Messages, and Messenger. In other words, to the degree that technology helps us talk to our friends, that's great, there's nothing wrong with that. Nobody wishes they spent less time on FaceTime with their friends. But at the other end, the bottom was Instagram at 37%. Only 37% of Instagram users are happy [00:50:00] with the amount of time they spend. Tinder is 40%, Facebook is 41%, Reddit is 43%. So I think this is very, very important. I think this really shows there's something wrong. And now let's dig deeper.

Okay, so what is it about those programs that, not just people regret using, but what is it that actually is the mechanism of harm? Look, if people over 18 choose to do something, if they choose to gamble or try heroin, that's their choice, I don't want to get involved in that, but the internet, this is pointed out to me by Beeban Kidron, a member of Parliament who studies this in the UK, the internet was not built with children in mind, yet a third of the people on the internet are children under 18. If we really take this seriously and say, "well, what kind of internet would we have built if we knew that a third of the people on it would be children, would it look like this?" for adults, you know, I don't wanna tell adults they can't do something because I think it's harmful, but for children it's different.

And then the other thing that's crucial here is that social media is not an individual choice. In one level it is, of course, by the children and the parents, [00:51:00] but when my son started sixth grade and everybody else was on Instagram at his middle school in New York City, and I said, no, you can't go on, well then he was excluded. Presumably none of the other parents wanted their kids on, but we all let our kids on, most people, because the other kids are on it. So the social media companies, either wittingly or unwittingly, have created a trap. Everybody lies about their age so they can get on whenever they want.

Actually though, to answer your question, you did say, well, aren't there all these good things. Yeah, of course there are, and if it wasn't for the mental health, suicide, and self-harm, I would say, "Hmm. Let's try to add up the pluses and minuses." We're talking between 50% and 150% increases in suicide for teenagers in the United States. So given that, I think we can say you can be as creative as you want on Instagram and TikTok, but maybe wait until at least the legal age of 13 and maybe even longer.

## **Spotlight — Addressing the TikTok Threat - Your Undivided Attention - Air Date 9-8- 22**

**ASA RASKIN - HOST, YOUR UNDIVIDED ATTENTION:** In the same way that Huawei would enable backdoor access to all the information of [00:52:00] our country, TikTok is sort of like cultural infrastructure. It gives you access not only to the data, but direct access to influence the minds information and attention of first, our youth culture, and then the entirety of our culture.

**TRISTAN HARRIS - HOST, YOUR UNDIVIDED ATTENTION:** And not to mention influencing the values of who we want to be when we grow up. We've mentioned the survey of what do kids in the US and Gen Z most want to be when they grow up? The number one most aspired career is an influencer. And in China, I think in this particular survey, it was an astronaut or a scientist. And keep in mind that inside of China domestically, they regulate TikTok to actually feature educational content. So as you're scrolling, instead of getting influencer videos and all of that, you actually get patriotism videos, science experiments you can do at home, museum exhibits, Chinese history, things like that.

And domestically for kids under the age of 14, they limit their use to 40 minutes a day. They also have opening hours and closing hours, so that at 10:00 PM it's lights out for the entire country, all of [00:53:00] TikTok goes dark and no kids under 14 can use it anymore. And then at six in the morning it opens up again, because they realize that TikTok might be the opiate for the masses and they don't wanna opiate their own. Meanwhile, they ship the unregulated version of TikTok to the rest of the world that maximizes influencer culture and narcissism, et cetera. So it's like feeding their own population spinach while shipping opium to the rest of the world.

And you could argue that's the West's fault. The West should be regulating TikTok to say, "well, what kind of influence do we want? If we want not an influencer culture, we should actually say we wanna pass laws that feature educational material or bridge building content that actually shows people where they agree in a democracy," but so far we're not doing those things.

**ASA RASKIN - HOST, YOUR UNDIVIDED ATTENTION:** I want to make one point about amplifaganda and free speech, because whenever we start to talk about regulating attention, we will always get into the conversation about free speech, and we need to return to the episode we did about Elon Musk and Twitter.

What is [00:54:00] the point of free speech? Free speech is a kind of immune system, a protection for democracies that both protects your individual ability to express, of course, but also for the ability of a nation to make good sense and good decisions. What we see with amplifaganda is a kind of zero day exploit against the value of free speech as it was written in 1791, because the Chinese government does have influence over TikTok and the algorithm that chooses what goes viral.

I wanna zoom out for a second because amplifaganda is an example of how a technological change can change the context in which a value is adequately expressed. Free speech worked as written in 1791 because there was no tech that could do amplifaganda. But this kind of thing has happened before, and we've had to update our philosophy to safeguard what we really value.

I'm thinking of the first mass produced camera, the Kodak camera. There is no right to privacy written into the Constitution, and you did not find the founding fathers discussing privacy, [00:55:00] so where did it come from? Well, the right to privacy came from Louis Brandeis, who would later become one of the most influential Supreme Court justices who's reacting to the mass produced camera. He wrote "instantaneous photographs and newspaper enterprise have invaded the sacred precincts of private and domestic life." That is, because of the invention of the. We needed to invent the idea of privacy in a way we didn't have it before.

So for amplifaganda and free speech, we are going to need to update our philosophy of what we think free speech is so that the security and protections we have can serve open society.

**TRISTAN HARRIS - HOST, YOUR UNDIVIDED ATTENTION:** It makes me think that we're obviously very familiar with security, but we're not familiar with psycho-security. How do we secure our minds of the culture that we want to be not influenced by outside forces? I think it actually even goes even deeper. We have a friend who knows some of the insides of TikTok and who told me that we need to actually see TikTok as [00:56:00] a parallel incentive system to capitalism.

Now, that might sound like a bold claim, but imagine that there's this other currency. In the form of TikTok, which is paying people in the currency of likes, followers, comments, and visibility. Now, just like a central bank has control over the money supply, TikTok has control over the engagement supply. They can tune the dials and say, we're gonna give you more likes, more followers, more comments, more influence, more visibility. If you say more things like this and less things like this.

**Male inequality, explained by an expert**  
**Richard Reeves - Big Think - Air Date 1-4-**  
**23**

**RICHARD REEVES:** The overall picture is that, on almost every measure, at almost every age, and in almost every advanced economy in the world, the girls are leaving the boys way behind, and the women leaving the men.

What nobody expected was that girls and women wouldn't just catch up to boys and men in education, but would blow right past them and keep going.

Everyone was very focused, quite rightly, on getting to gender equality, getting to gender parity. It's not that long ago where there was a huge gender gap the other way, and [00:57:00] there was huge focus, correctly, in the seventies and eighties, to really promote women and girls in education.

But the line just kept going. And nobody predicted that. Nobody was saying, What if gender inequality reemerges in just as big a way as now, in some cases bigger, but the other way around? And to some extent, everyone's still trying to get their head around this new world where, at least in education, when you talk about gender inequality, you are pretty much always talking about the ways in which girls and women are ahead of boys and men. And that's happened in a very, very short period of human history.

So if you look at the US, for example, in the average school district in the US, girls are almost a grade level ahead of boys in English and have caught up in math.

If we look at those with the highest GPA scores, the top 10%, two thirds of those are girls. If we look at those at the bottom, two thirds of those are boys. When it comes to going to college, there's a 10 percentage gap in college enrollment, a similar-sized gap in completing college, conditioned on [00:58:00] enrolling. And the result of those trends is that the gender gap in getting a college degree is now wider than it was in 1972, but the other way around.

So in 1972, when Title IX was passed to promote more gender equality in education, there was a 13 percentage point gap in favor of men getting college degrees. Now there's a 15 percentage point gap in favor of women getting college degrees. So the gender inequality we see in college today is wider than it was 50 years ago. It's just the other way around.

There's quite a fierce debate about the differences between male and female brains and in adulthood, I think there's not much evidence that the brains are that different in ways that we should worry about or that are particularly consequential.

But where there's no real debate is in the timing of brain development. It is quite clear that girls brains develop more quickly than boys brains do, and that the biggest difference seems to occur in [00:59:00] adolescence. So what happens is in adolescence, we develop what neuroscientists call the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex of our brain is sometimes known as the CEO of the brain. It's the bit of your brain that says you should do your chemistry homework rather than going out to party. It's the bit of your brain that says it *is* worth maintaining a high GPA 'cause it'll help you get to college, which might help you in the future. And that bit of the brain develops considerably earlier in girls than in boys: between one and two years earlier, partly because girls go into puberty a bit earlier than boys and that seems to trigger some of this development.

What that means is if you have an education system that rewards the ability to turn in homework, stay on task, worry about your GPA, prepare for college and so on, then just structurally that's going to put an advantage the group whose brains have developed earlier in those particular areas, and that turns out on average to be girls.

I think it's a great irony of women's progress, that by taking the [01:00:00] brakes off women's educational opportunities and aspirations, we've revealed the fact that the education system is slightly structured against boys and men because of these differences in the timing of brain development. But it took the women's movement to show that. Because the natural advantages of women in education were impossible to see when women's aspirations were being capped by a sexist society. Now that those caps have been largely removed, we can see that it's boys and men who are at a disadvantage in the education system.

At the risk of sounding boring, let's collect the data first so we know what we are dealing with here. I do think that we should be strongly encouraging boys to start school a year later than girls. I think that should become the default in many school districts because of the developmental gap that there is between boys and girls, because boys brains mature more slowly, then them starting school a year later would mean that they were developmentally closer to being peers with the girls in the classroom.

We [01:01:00] need a lot more male teachers. It's striking that the teaching profession has become steadily more female over time. Only 24% of K-12 teachers now are male. That's down from 33% in the eighties, and fewer men are applying to teacher training year on year. And so we've seen this steady shift towards a close to an all female environment that has all kinds of consequences for the ethos of the school, for the way we deal with different kinds of behavior

among boys and girls, for example. And so we need a very serious and intentional effort to get more men into teaching.

The third thing I would do in this world where I have significant power to dictate policies would be significantly more investment in vocational education and training. That is an area where we do seem to see better results for boys and men on average, and one that's woefully underinvested in in the US. The US has really bet most of its dollars on a very academic, a very narrow route towards success, and less [01:02:00] emphasis on vocational training. And that has actually put boys and men at a disadvantage. So apprenticeships, technical, high schools are actually a really good way to help more boys and men.

I think one of the challenges with this debate is that if you're talking to women and men who are, say, at the top of the economic ladder, four year college degrees, decent incomes, they look around and they don't see some of these issues. But that's not the same for working class men. That's not the same for men lower down the economic ladder. So there's a danger that we're so busy, to borrow Sheryl Sandberg's phrase, so busy "leaning in" that we don't look down. The reality for men further down the ladder is very different.

## Summary 4-26-23

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today starting with Axios, speaking with Senator Josh Hawley. Big Think featured Richard Reeves, discussing the modern gender divide. The Man Enough podcast spoke with Liz Plank and Richard Reeves about the importance of getting language right to make progress. The PBS NewsHour reported on the high levels of sadness and violence being experienced by teen girls.

[01:03:00] The Diary of A CEO talked with Scott Galloway about the growing misogyny and the need to redefine masculinity. Keep Talking pointed to Andrew Tate as a symptom of society, rather than the cause of our problems. The PBS NewsHour dove into the personal story of a young woman's struggle with social media addiction.

Your Undivided Attention looked at the impact of social media on depression, anxiety, and suicide rates. The Diary of A CEO continued their talk with Scott Galloway about the need for healthy socialization and connection to a collective purpose. And Your Undivided Attention looked at the self-reported regret people have after using social media.

That's what everybody heard, but members also heard bonus clips from Your Undivided Attention. Focusing in on TikTok and the differences in how it's used in China versus the rest of the world.

We heard more from Richard Reeve's Big Think presentation on the gender divide.

To hear that and have all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly to the new members-only [01:04:00] podcast feed that you'll receive.

Sign up to support the show at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support), or shoot me an email requesting a financial hardship membership because we don't let a lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information. Now, we'll hear from you, and the first message is a follow up from the previous episode in which Boris from Brussels gently criticized the recent episode about JK Rowling for focusing on the wrong target. To which I responded that I made the episode I wanted to make because I thought the topic was valuable.

## **Continuing discussion of J.K. Rowling episode - VoiceMailer Boris**

**VOICEDMAILER BORIS:** Hi Jay, this is Boris.

Thanks for airing my reply and for your elaborate response on today's episode, I'm really honored to be mentioned.

You're right, many of the things we take for granted in Belgium are still a struggle in the US and in many other parts of the world and are hard to comprehend when you're not living it yourself. I certainly didn't want to minimize the threats LGBTQ communities are facing! My point was more that we are on the right side of history. Let's keep the moral high ground and condemn threats to people like [01:05:00] JK Rowling, whose views are considered moderate by most and not existentially threatening on their own, and instead engage them with informed arguments. These threats only create more divisions and indeed provide fuel for reactionaries of which there are plenty. Let's reserve our ire for real fascists.

In Belgium we certainly have our fascist incubators and the threat is still lurking in fringe student clubs, anti establishment movements and right-wing groupings. However, lately most of my mental bandwidth has been directed at an aggressive and openly fascist, ultra-nationalist, authoritarian and revisionist



regime, Russia, which has started a destructive war and has the audacity to call its enemies Nazis. Incidentally, that's one of the reasons why I don't like it if these terms are used lightly.

## Marking an isolating Black leaders - V from Central New York

**VOICEMAILER V FROM CENTRAL NEW YORK:** Hello, Jay. This is V from Central New York. I'm calling about a future show I believe you will produce on the [01:06:00] Tennessee three, and specifically the expulsion of the two Justins. I'm calling as a Black man, to be honest and frank with you. As a Black man who wants to talk briefly to a white audience that I believe is experiencing some of the same thoughts that I have heard repeated by other white commentators over the last few days.

One of those thoughts centers around how articulate these brothers are, and what beautiful leaders they are going to be for the Black community. Some of those comments centers around, why has there not been, and why are there not more Black men like this? To obviously [01:07:00] say nothing about our Black Sisters who have been leading our community through some very difficult times in the last 30 years.

I want your audience to understand a point that was made by or within the podcast known as The Leftist Mafia, you can find it on Rational National's YouTube page. It's a point that many white folks may have thought about, but they haven't wanted to give voice to.

That is, the reason we don't see a lot of Black men that sound like these brothers rise to the level of not only good leadership, but great leadership, is because they are targeted, isolated, and minimized. Like these brothers are being targeted, isolated and minimized [01:08:00] right now.

If they don't shush when they are targeted, especially in the South, the agitation on the part of those opposing them moves quickly from isolation to elimination.

We are seeing a microcosmic aspect of what the Black community has been dealing with for the last 60 years.

We raise up leaders and we build institutions, to not only support those leaders, but to support their work within the community, so it can be regenerated throughout the generations. Reactionary forces, sometimes governmental,

sometimes extra governmental, sometimes [01:09:00] non-governmental come in to remove the leader, destroy the institution.

I need the people listening to your podcast to understand this point.

What you are seeing here is the beginning stages of marking these brothers. So that in Tennessee, and elsewhere throughout the country, reactionary forces will always be on the lookout for them.

Expulsion from a house chamber is the beginning step.

## **Final comments on the fundamental disconnections that tend to drive modern debate**

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** if you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can record or text us a message at 202-999-3991 or send an email to [01:10:00] Jay@BestoftheLeft.com.

Thanks, as always, to V for his insights, and to Boris. I am fascinated by this line of argument, primarily because I don't really feel like Boris and I disagree all that much. Boris's criticism, which he is now clarifying, is that we should take the moral high ground and condemn threats to people like Rowling, highlight that she's a moderate in her thinking, which makes her not existentially threatening on her own, and that we should focus our energy on the real fascists, particularly people like the government of Russia who launched an invasion based partly on the dubious argument that their Ukrainian enemies were themselves Nazis. Because calling someone a Nazi is a great way to shape public opinion and gain support for an attack against that group of people.

Now, for context, we are discussing an episode in which the main point I wanted to make wasn't really about JK Rowling. It was about how multiple [01:11:00] groups of people have ended up using almost identical arguments against each other to make diametrically opposing points. And the primary example of this is how JK Rowling and other anti-trans feminists are, though not fascists themselves, more closely aligned ideologically with fascists than trans rights advocates are, for obvious reasons. And yet, one of their primary arguments is that the trans rights community itself is authoritarian, illiberal, and,

in Rowling's words, akin to the death eaters of the Harry Potter universe, which is as close as one can get to calling someone a Nazi without calling them a Nazi.

So I found that interesting, and made a show about it, in which I feel like I did exactly what someone like Boris would want me to do. I said that Rowling was a moderate in her anti-trans views:

" And now I want to make sure to be fair and say that Rowling is definitely a moderate within the camp [01:12:00] of anti-trans feminists. There are people far worse than her. She at least believes that trans people are real and support for them is necessary."

I highlighted a speaker who condemns attacks on Rowling:

**CONTRAPPOINTS:** " Have people been abusive, disproportionate, out of line, and reacting against J.K. Rowling? Of course. Do I endorse people saying like violent or abusive, cruel things? No. I've been the target of a lot of that myself. But I also kind of understand what people are mad about."

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** And I created a detailed explanation of why it's so dangerous to go around baselessly calling people Nazis because of how it shapes public opinion against that group and opens them up for attack.

So where do Boris and I really disagree here? But to be clear, just in case you got lost in the analogy at all, JK Rowling is not akin to the government of Russia in the scenario. She would be more similar to a very popular [01:13:00] influencer who doesn't really support the invasion of Ukraine, but still agrees with Putin that Ukraine is overrun by Nazis. And in the war of public opinion, where lives are on the line, that seems like a perfectly valid target to focus on.

But even then, if she were just an influential person saying bad things about trans people, I wouldn't necessarily have thought that warranted a full episode discussion. What made it interesting enough to do that was the fundamental disconnect or misunderstanding or mirror image logic at play that led Rowling to accuse the trans community of being exactly that which threatens them the most, while completely exonerating her own side, which is actually closer to the fascists on the issue, to the point where neo-Nazis have started showing up to support anti-trans feminist marches. That level of misunderstanding is a fascinating phenomenon, and it's becoming more and more a part of everyday political debate, so it's really worth understanding.

And frankly, [01:14:00] this conversation we're having right now seems to be a vague approximation of that same problem. I mean, we're not on polar opposites of our argument here. But there's a lot of confusion, and suggestions of how things should have gone, coming from Boris, which seems to me to describe exactly what I already did. So there's some fundamental misunderstanding, disconnection, mirror image logic, who knows what, going on here. Because again, I don't really see how we're disagreeing at all, other than maybe that I tried to make an argument for why what JK Rowling is doing is extremely dangerous, and I didn't do a good enough job of making that argument, because it doesn't seem to have fully landed with Boris. Anyway, I try.

As always, keep the comments coming in. You can leave a voicemail as always, or you can send us a text message through SMS or on WhatsApp or the Signal messaging app, all with the same number, 202-999-3991. [01:15:00] Or keep it old school by emailing me to Jay@BestoftheLeft.com.

Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show, and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to our Transcriptionist Trio, Ken, Brian and LaWendy, for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, web mastering, and bonus show co-hosting. And thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at BestoftheLeft.com/support, through our Patreon page, or from right inside the Apple Podcast app. Membership is how you get instant access to our incredibly good bonus episodes, in addition to there being extra content and no ads in all of our regular episodes, all through your regular podcast player. And you can join the discussion on our Discord community; there's a link to join in the show notes.

So coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay!, and this has been the *Best of the Left* podcast coming to you twice [01:16:00] weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from BestoftheLeft.com.