

[Transcript] The Ezra Klein Show / The Teen Mental Health Crisis, Part 1

So, before we jump in today, I want to tell you about something the New York Times has been working on for a while. And I'm going to level with you that when they started telling me about this project, I was very skeptical of it, which made for a couple of awkward internal conversations. Because what I understood them to be working on was a podcast app. And I thought to myself, who needs another podcast app? There are plenty of them on the market already. None of them are great, but they're fine. And then they gave me the new app as a beta tester. And I realized that I was wrong about what they're building, at least partly wrong, because what they actually built is something nobody has created yet, which is a portal to the world of audio journalism. There are podcasts, including this one, but also stories, essays, profiles, you can listen to digest of the news and to full news stories and to full magazine stories. You don't have to choose anymore between listening to a podcast and actually getting the news. You can get the news you used to read, but done in a really, really strong, really professional audio format. And not just from the New York Times, our stories are from other publishers too. So the app again is called New York Times Audio. It's an iOS app. You get it from the app store. And it is for New York Times news subscribers, which come on, if you're listening to this show, I hope you're a subscriber for that by now. So check it out. It really is something new. It really is something worth trying.

I'm going to start today's show with some numbers. Between 2011 and 2021, the number of teens and young

adults with clinical depression, it more than doubled, more than doubled. Between 2007 and 2019, the suicide rate for those in their early 20s rose by 41%. And the suicide rate for 10 to 14 year olds, 10 to 14 year olds, think about how young that is. It tripled and it nearly quadrupled for girls. A CDC survey found that in 2021, almost 60% of high school girls experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness during the past year. And nearly 25%, I just, this number, man, nearly 25% made a suicide plan. Something is going terribly wrong for teenagers. Whatever it is started well before the pandemic. And this is important enough and big enough that we're going to do a couple of episodes exploring it. But I wanted our first one to really try to dig into these numbers. What do we know is happening here? Why is it happening? You can't begin to solve a problem like this. At least you have a theory of what has been causing it.

Jean Twange is a research psychologist who has been deep in this data for years.

She's one of the earliest to see something going wrong with teen mental health.

And then in her 2017 book, *iGen* and her new book *Generations*, she's put together reams of charts and graphs and theories and tests to try to understand what it is, what has happened here.

And the leading candidate in her view is smartphones and social media. And if that's true, if they really are doing this level of damage to kids today, then we need to be thinking about interventions here on a whole different scale than most policymakers have been willing to touch.

And I want to say this episode obviously deals a lot with suicide. And if you or someone you know or love is struggling here, get help. There is a lot of help out there. So call or text 988 to reach the suicide and crisis lifeline. As always, my email as a recline show at nytimes.com.

Jean Twange, welcome to the show. Thank you.

So in your new book *Generations*, you write quote that there's a full blown mental health crisis among young people. And it was building long before the COVID-19 pandemic.

So walk me through some of the data. And your book is really shock full of data and graphs,

which I really appreciated about it. Walk me through some of the data that persuaded you of that. Yeah. So I work with these large national surveys often of teens. And I've been doing that for a number of years. So when I first started to see these trends, they were surprising because they were so sudden. So around 2012, more and more teens started to say they felt lonely and left out. And more started to say they felt like they couldn't do anything right or that they didn't enjoy life. Those last two are classic symptoms of depression. Then other data started to pop up. Clinical level depression then requires treatment started to rise. Emergency room admissions for self-harm started to rise in CDC data. Same thing for suicide attempts and completed suicides. So at first, thought it might be a blip, year or two of data, but it kept going. So for example, between 2011 and 2019, well before the pandemic, clinical level depression among teens doubled. Emergency room admissions for self-harm tripled in 10 to 14 year old girls. So this is why I say we know it's not just the pandemic. And those objective measures of behavior, is that one of the ways we know, because I think this is a common suspicion at about this point in the conversation that we're not just dealing with a rise in reporting or a decrease in stigma. Maybe it's much easier to say and admit that you're depressed than it was in 1985. So exactly. That's how we know it's not just about more willingness to report, is that these objective measures like the emergency room admissions for not just for self-harm, but also for suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts have gone up. And the pattern is extremely similar to the self-reports. I mean, the other thing that has to be kept in mind about these self-reports is these surveys are anonymous. Many of them also ask about drug and alcohol use, all of which is illegal in these age groups. So these surveys, better than anybody, know how to make sure to get across to young people, how confidential it is. What are we seeing in terms of the demographic differences here between boys and girls, among races, classes, geographies? Are there patterns being picked up there that are worth noting? So the biggest difference is boys versus girls. And it varies a little bit from one measure to another. So for clinical level depression, it's doubled for both girls and boys. But because teen girls' rates of depression are and were always higher, the number of people that this affects is larger for girls. And then in many of the other measures we've been discussing, the changes are considerably larger for girls than for boys. So self-harm behaviors is one of those where there's not as much change for boys as there is for girls. Same is true for the suicide rate that it has changed for both, but it has changed more and increased more among girls than among boys. I want to zoom in here on suicide itself. You compare the actual suicide rate increases between 2007, not that long ago, and 2019. And you say of the increase, quote, it's a total of 17,677 additional young lives lost, averaging more than 1,300 a year, enough to fill nine planes. Imagine if nine airline flights filled with 10 to 24-year-olds crashed every single year, killing everyone on board. That's a really profound and shocking rise. So how do you understand the rise in suicide itself? So I think we have to look at the pattern across all of the measures. So not just suicide, but also those ER admissions for self-harm, the rise in depression, the rise in anxiety, the rise in unhappiness, and across the board, all of these indicators have gotten worse in terms of mental health. And the pattern is fairly similar that around 2010 or so, these indicators start to get worse. Now, the exact time when they start to increase varies a little bit from one measure to another, sometime between 2009 and 2013. It's right in that time period. So you have to ask, what happened during that time period? Because we're not trying to explain all of the causes

[Transcript] The Ezra Klein Show / The Teen Mental Health Crisis, Part 1

of mental health issues among teens. We want to know why it increased so much over such a short period of time. So it has to be something that changed around that time and then kept going in the same direction over the next decade or so. So when I first started to see these changes, I had absolutely no idea what the cost could be. It was pretty clear it was not economics, because the U.S. economy finally started to improve after about 2011, after the Great Recession. It was difficult to think of any major event that occurred around that time and then reverberated throughout the decade. And then one day I came across the results of a poll from the Pew Center for Research. And it showed that the end of 2012 was the first time that the majority of Americans owned a smartphone. And in these same surveys of teens, that time period was also when social media use moved from something that about half of teens were doing every day. It was in 2009 to by 2015, 2016, about 80% of them were doing it every day. So then basically what happened is social media use moved from optional to almost mandatory among teens. So that's when I started to think maybe that had something to do with it, that teens were spending so much more time online, also because this lined up with other things, like they were also sleeping less. The trend isn't exactly the same pattern that started to increase after 2011 or 2012. And they also started spending less time with their friends in person. So that had started to decline just a little bit after about 2000. And then it really falls off a cliff after 2010. So you put this together, there was a fundamental change in the way teens spent their time outside of school, starting in that same time period, early 2010s. And that coincides with pretty good precision with when mental health started to suffer. So before we go deep into the smartphone thesis, I want to zoom in on something you said there about the data, which is that we're trying to explain a change in the time series, right? There's this very sharp, just the line goes almost straight up, starting to say around like 2011, 2012. But something that was striking when we were doing prep for this was, I saw this figure from the researchers, Will Reinhardt and Taylor Barclay. And they found that if you go back to the late 1960s, and you graph the teen suicide rate, it looks more cyclical rather than a trend just going upward. So it's higher in the 80s than now, then it falls for a long time until about 2008. And then it picks up again, getting us to where we are now. So if we're kind of explaining the rise, how do we also explain the fall that preceded it? I mean, there are no smartphones in the 1980s. So what do you understand as having gone on in the 80s that led to such a high suicide rate and then stopped happening such that it went down to what we're now thinking of as a more normal baseline? So it is true that the suicide rate for teens in the late 80s and early 90s was very high. It was much higher than it was, say, for boomer teens in 1970. So one thing we have to keep in mind here is just the greater cultural context that there was a big rise in violent crime around this time. It was kind of a disordered time in the culture. So there was a recession. This is around the time that Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign kept talking about change because it was such a pessimistic time in the country. And for teens in particular, and we're talking about suicides in particular, there's another element. So there was a huge availability of inexpensive guns around that time. So they were called Saturday Night Specials. And when you break it down for firearm suicides versus non-firearm suicides went down or didn't change a whole lot during that time period when it was the Gen Xers who were teens, it was really that increase in the firearm suicides. So it may

have had a fair amount to do with the preponderance of cheap guns.

So one of your big theses throughout generations is that generations are technologically mediated, that more than they're defined by cultural events, they're defined by the technologies they have accessible to them. So your thinking on this is that technology that was mediating that was guns. But then why would it fall?

Well, the folks that looked at this concluded that there were more restrictions starting in the mid-90s. And what I do know for sure, the violent crime rate definitely started to go down. After about 1993 was the peak and dense things started to improve and they kept improving for a really long time. So I still think that that general atmosphere of that time, which was really a tough time to be a teen, particularly if depending on the neighborhood you were in, but particularly if you were in a place that was impacted by this very, very high level of violent crime.

Violent crime actually gets it why I wanted to ask this before we got into smartphones, because I'm much more familiar with the debate over crime than I am over the debate over suicide trend lines. And the thing that is always striking to me and I think really underplayed in our national discourse over crime is that we don't really understand it. That if you go into the 80s and the 90s, you see crime goes way, way up in the 70s, way, way up in all kinds of different jurisdictions, more or less all at the same time. And then it begins going way, way down in all kinds of different places all at the same time. So you have stories that people know like there's New York with Rudy Giuliani and broken windows policing and stop and frisk. But it also goes down in all these places that didn't do what New York City did. It's so widespread, both the rise and the fall that you end up having researchers trying to think of even broader explanations like whether or not lead and the amount of lead in young kids' bloodstream and thus the effect on their executive function when they got older, maybe that's the causal mechanism. And it made me wonder if there isn't a chance that suicide and teen mental health is like that, that it has this kind of all the way up, all the way down in all places and we don't really understand why pattern to it.

Well, I think, and I think your point is very well taken about crime rates that they are a little bit of a mystery. It's also true, sure, that for mental health, we can't randomly assign people to be born at different times and then see what their mental health looks like. That would be the gold standard of a random assignment experiment and it's literally impossible. So we have to go on the data that we have. But I think for the recent rise in mental health issues, we can look at it this way, that this is a generation where violent crime is a lot lower than it was in the early 90s.

Teen pregnancy was lower. They're even less likely to get into car accidents or get into physical fights at school. Incomes were up for that period. There's all these things that were going right, yet still mental health among teens suffered. So there must have been some big mechanism. The reason why I think the smartphones and social media explanation has held up is because that is what had the biggest impact on the day-to-day lives of teens. It wasn't something that happened to their parents. It wasn't a single thing they read about in the news. It completely restructured their time outside of school because social media is social, it impacts even people who don't use it, and it had a huge impact on the way teens spent time with their friends, that they started spending a lot less time with each other face to face. And you think about what's important for mental health overall, its relationships. Then you think about teens in particular. That is what makes or breaks mental health for a teen is their relationships, particularly their friendships, and the way those friendships were conducted changed completely. So I want to dig into this piece of it more because smartphones sound like a singular

cause, but when I read you on this and when I read others, it decomposes into something very multi-causal. So tell me the different mechanisms. You talk about time displacement and social effects

and time spent with friends and sleep. What are the different mechanisms that you understand as smartphones as triggering that contribute to this for you?

There are a lot of different mechanisms. It's another reason why it is such a plausible explanation. So as we've already talked about, there's the time displacement, not just with in-person interactions with friends, but also with sleep. Sleep is absolutely crucial for mental health. Not sleeping enough is a huge risk factor for depression and suicidal thoughts. And sleep deprivation among teens in two different surveys shows exactly the same pattern as the mental health issues, which is around 2012 or so, it starts going up. So that's our first couple of mechanisms. And just hold on on that one for a minute.

What makes you certain that that isn't just correlation with the takeoff in smartphones?

What makes you think that smartphones are directly leading to less sleep for teens?

So there's many correlational and experimental studies say in sleep labs showing that, for example, people have their phones in their bedrooms overnight, that that disrupts sleep. That looking at a device before bedtime leads to less sleep and less quality sleep.

So because, for a number of reasons, first, they're psychologically stimulating. Pretty much everything people do on the phone is psychologically stimulating, particularly for teens where the number of likes they got on their Instagram post or whether they're crushed texted them back is very important. These are not relaxing thoughts yet. Many, many, many teens are looking at their phones right up until they go to sleep. Plus, there's a physiological element. The blue light on those devices shines into your eyes, tricks your brain into thinking it's still daytime, and then you don't make as much melatonin, the sleep hormone that you need to fall asleep quickly and get a good night's sleep. And this is correlational experimental that that piece of the research literature is extremely solid on that connection between spending time on the devices and not sleeping enough. All right. So that is smartphones and sleep. What are the other mechanisms? So there's all of the things that happen when a teen uses social media. So we can start with things like social comparison and body image issues. So if this is what Facebook's own research shows, as well as plenty of external academic research as well, that looking at, say, these ideal bodies on Instagram or even the people you go to high school with, and they look more glamorous, and you're comparing your body to theirs and your appearance to theirs

and coming up short. So that's the social comparison piece. And lots of studies on this that people have spent more time, and especially those who spend more time looking at those images on Instagram, if they have that tendency towards social comparison, that's where you get the body image issues, appearance issues, and then those mediate it, those can then lead to depression. And in Facebook's research, they had a bunch of focus groups as well

as large surveys, and they found this over and over. And the focus group quotes, some of them were really stunning. They would talk about a grief spiral, and they start looking at these images, feel inadequate, then get depressed. Then there's all of the other things that people have discussed, you know, about the influence of social media, that it means popularity becomes a number. How many likes do you have? How many followers do you have? And it's never enough.

[Transcript] The Ezra Klein Show / The Teen Mental Health Crisis, Part 1

Then cyberbullying, some of the habit holes that people end up going down that has been documented. If you start looking for healthy eating, you might end up on pro-anorexia sites, and there's no way to reset that, and that negative material keeps showing up. Same thing for a lot of things around mental health. And again, it just becomes a spiral.

One thing about smartphones is they're an international phenomenon, social media.

So what do you see in the international data here? So in the international data, we see exactly the same pattern as we see in the US for teen mental health.

That in 36 countries around the world, adolescent loneliness began to increase after 2012, just like it does in the US data. We have solid data on depression and on happiness in English-speaking countries, again, exact same pattern. So in the UK, in Australia, in Canada, exact same pattern for teens for anxiety and depression, self-harm, unhappiness, it's just very, very consistent. And that also suggests some cause that was worldwide that helps us rule out more US-based explanations like worries around school shootings, which tend not to happen in other countries, and certain political events.

How does the smartphone thesis map on to the, not just the observation, the reality that this has been much worse among girls and boys?

Well, girls spend more time on social media, and time on social media is more strongly linked to depression than time spent on, say, gaming, which is where boys spend more of their screen time. So those two factors, they spend more time on it, and it's more strongly linked to depression for them, might explain the gender difference.

I find that pretty striking. Why do you think gaming is not as linked to some of these negative outcomes? These days, the way most teens and adults game, it's often interactive.

So they'll play games with their friends, they aren't there face to face, but it's often in real time, and they'll often talk to each other as they're playing the game. So, you know, not the same as running around outside playing football, say, but still in real time and still interaction with friends, where on social media, only some of it is interaction with friends. A good amount of it is, you know, watching TikTok videos from people you've never met, or scanning through the pages

of Instagram influencers. This is one thing I was trying to sit with as I read the book and thought about this data, that gaming has this tendency to be not just a directive, but it's you doing it, it's you doing something, where social media has this weird tendency to put you outside yourself looking in. I mean, you've talked about it as comparative, but it's also you're posting pictures, you're writing things, and then seeing how people respond. You're always putting yourself out for judgment, and you begin to inhabit the judge in a weird way. I mean, I certainly felt this myself, and I did not get social media when I was a 13-year-old. Is there something to that, the way that gaming keeps you in yourself and social media takes you outside yourself?

I think so. It reminds me of some of the research on what's called self-objectification in terms of appearance, that particularly for women, there's the pressure to focus on how your body looks to others, rather than what your body can do, say, in terms of sports or other things. And it's somewhat of the same element, because in gaming, you can do things, and maybe you're going to fail, and maybe your friends will make fun of you. But still, you're doing something. You have at least some perceived level of control. And in social media, there is that same perceived level of control. However, there's only so far you can go to modify your appearance and try to measure up to all the perfect people who you see online. And you're right, it's about so much more

about the judgment of others than it is about what you're doing.

How much is social media also simply a vector for contagion of anti-social behaviors themselves, or depressive and anxious and self-harming thoughts and patterns themselves? And I mean something very specific here. So back in the day, when I covered more school shootings, there was an argument not to use the names of school shooters, sometimes not even. You would actually get the argument not to cover them, because there is a well-known copycat effect.

There's also a well-known effect like that around suicide. People know that the more they hear about suicide, the likelihood of suicide is to occur to others. There's a Netflix show about the suicide of a teen called 13 Reasons Why, and there was a big debate, including some research about whether or not that itself increased suicide among teens.

And so there's an argument out there that as people are exposed to simply the knowledge that other people are doing these things, killing themselves, killing others, hurting themselves, hurting others, that that itself is enough for more people to do it. And anybody who spent time on social media also sees a lot more just discussion of anxiety, discussion of depression. Those feelings, those interpretive frameworks for your own feelings becomes more at hand.

So how much is it just possible here that you're seeing contagion as a force gathering its own momentum, that people are more connected to others, having these kinds of experiences, and so they're having more than themselves?

And I think that might explain some of the acceleration in the trend or part of it.

I don't think it can explain why it started to begin with. So I think we have to consider that there was an origin to this, because why couldn't it be that people are talking about how optimistic or happy they are online, and that that becomes contagious? So I had to start somewhere, because there was that very sudden shift from millennials being self-confident and optimistic as teens to Gen Z being not. And it happened very quickly. It was a much more stark generational difference than I'd really documented in my whole career.

So I want to note that there are some studies that have looked at this and found very little effect or no effect or reverse effect. There was a 2019 study in Nature-Human Behavior that found, the association we find between digital technology use and adolescent well-being is negative but small, explaining the most 0.4% of the variation in well-being. There was a 2018 study in Psychiatric Quarterly that also found very unremarkable results. You've kept along with John Height and some others

this online compendium of studies on teen mental health. So when you see these studies, and there are a good number of them that come out and say, we checked into this and we just can't find anything

significant or big here. How do you interpret what's happening in them? And if they do, how do they change your priors? So that 2019 Nature-Human Behavior study has been pretty thoroughly debunked

because three other research groups analyzed the same data and found there was actually a very strong link between social media and depression, especially among girls, in that same data. It was very interesting. The same month that that study came out, another research group in the UK used the same data set and found that three times as many heavy users of social media were depressed as non-users among girls. That's not small. So then I and then another research group from Spain, who I have no connection to, later used the same more sophisticated statistical technique that those authors did in the Nature-Human Behavior paper and we both independently

came

to the same conclusion that first there was some very strange methodological choices in that 2019 paper and also that if you zero in on social media and if you zero in on girls, there are definitely significant and impactful differences. If I know the 2018 psychiatric quarterly paper that you're discussing, I reanalyzed that data for a paper recently, same thing. And it also turns out if you take that data and look at it in a more intuitive way, let's just look at the percentage who are depressed at every level of social media use. It's extremely common to find that pattern that those who don't use social media use it only lightly compared to those who use it heavily, that there's twice as many in the heavy use group, particularly among girls who are depressed compared to the light or no use group. So these papers that say, oh, there's nothing here, often are just looking at screen time overall. The 2019 paper included owning a computer. It also included watching TV. So they often don't zero in on social media. They often don't break down the data by boys versus girls. And they take correlations that translate to that doubling of depression and say, oh, that's small. And I just don't see how you could consider that small to have twice as many who are depressed. Tell me a bit more actually about that screen time question because one thing you'll hear in this conversation is we had a big moral panic about television. And it turns out that a lot of us grow up watching a lot of television and many of us at least think we are fine. Maybe we are not. I would argue that point actually, but that may be a whole other discussion. I sort of agree with you that I think actually a bunch of the TV people were right about this. But tell me about that because there is nevertheless in the data, as I understand it, a finding at this point that television does not seem to have the level of significant negative effects on mental health that social media does. But so I'd first like to hear your point on maybe we're not fine because television messed with our brains. And then I'd like to hear the difference between what you see in the data on using a screen for television and using it for social media. So the impacts of television, it's not quite as much for mental health per se as it is for things like the feeling of community, materialism, the amount people read, the national discourse and how tolerant it is of more complex arguments. These are all a lot of the things that I think we lost to television. Social skills mean you can go on. Robert Putnam's book *Bowling Alone* basically says, yes, it's television. That's why we don't have all these community groups like we used to. But for mental health, for the moment, yes, if you spend a lot of time watching TV, you are more likely to be depressed. That is still true. It's just that that link is considerably smaller. So spending three hours watching TV is not as linked to depression as spending three hours on social media, for example. So there's an observation here, as you just mentioned, that how much people use is very highly correlated to what the effect of the use seems to be. But something you'll hear about that is that maybe that goes the other way. Maybe you watch a lot of TV because you're depressed, because you don't have other good options. Maybe you're on social media all the time because you don't have other friends. Maybe the causal arrow is going in the other direction. And particularly social media, in this case, the TV in another era and for some people even now, that you're on there a lot because things are not going well for you already. It's not that things are not going well for you because you're on there a lot. How do you think about that? So there's two different questions here. So one is that overall pattern of, say, teen depression increasing so much after 2012. So there, it seems pretty clear that it's technology leading to depression rather than the other way around. Because if it was depression causing

[Transcript] The Ezra Klein Show / The Teen Mental Health Crisis, Part 1

technology use, you'd have to say this. You'd have to say, okay, teen depression started to increase for some completely unknown reason nobody's been able to figure out yet. And that's why teens started to buy smartphones and spend a lot of time on social media. Like it just doesn't work. So it seems pretty clear that at the generational level, we're not getting reverse causation. Now at the individual level, sure, that's a more plausible explanation. But we have a good amount of experimental data now to suggest that at least some and probably most of the causation is going from the technology use to depression. So a couple of examples. There's been several studies that have asked people to either give up or cut back on their social media use. Those who gave up social media are happier and less depressed than those who continued their normal use. There's also a really cool study that takes advantage of basically a natural experiment that Facebook rolled out at different times on different college campuses. And they documented that as a campus got Facebook, the mental health among the students on that campus started to suffer. So I want to look at some of the other broad theories because you can buy the smartphone thesis broadly and I do and still wonder if there's not other causal mechanisms happening here. One you will hear a lot is that we're not seeing a mental health crisis. We're seeing what's called a reality crisis. One version of this is that teens today are upset and depressed and anxious because of economic prospects because they're coming of age in an era when capitalism is going awry because they're coming of age in an era of climate crisis and wars and Donald Trump. Tell me how you take that argument that this is in some ways a rational response to a declining reality. So first I think we have to take a step back and look at the broad picture is living right now in 2023 really worse than it was say in March 2020 at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Is it really worse than say the millennials graduating from college during the great recession? Is it worse than 1992 or three during the height of the violent crime wave? Is it worse than in the 80s when we thought Russia would drop the bomb tomorrow and the whole world would end? Is it worse than rumors getting drafted into Vietnam? A lot of people would say well you think about it that way, no it's not. And then we can take kind of the specific explanations and I you know I want to be clear it is I completely agree important to consider these alternative explanations and see if they fit the data. So wars well if that were the case wouldn't you expect teen depression to have been the highest? Well especially during World War II no it was lower by the measures we have then and then more recently then you'd expect teen depression to be the highest when we were at war in Iraq and Afghanistan and instead that's when we had some of the lowest rates of depression and suicide among teens. Climate change so one of the things that is in the the Gen X chapter of generations is the high school student surveys that ask about concern for the environment. Things like government should change your banned products to help the environment, they should increase prices and taxes to help the environment, people are going to have to change their way of life to help the environment. So we have data on that between 1976 and 2021 and the peak of those attitudes was in the 90s, not recently. So that I think argues away from the idea that it would be worries around climate change plus if it was climate change what you would expect is that you'd see the biggest increases in depression among older adolescents and young adults where these are issues that they're talking about at school, they might be reading news. Instead what we see the biggest increases is among 10 to 14 year olds. It's less likely to fall into that category of

[Transcript] The Ezra Klein Show / The Teen Mental Health Crisis, Part 1

placing a lot of importance on issues that affect the nation and the world. All right so that's two of them what were some of the others economics, median incomes that are all-time highs adjusted for

inflation, the US economy was on a tear between 2011 and 2019 and we see the biggest increase in teen depression. So most of these other things don't fit the data all that well.

So if we look closer though at a kind of an individual issue here, you know you mentioned gun violence and there I think you look at that on school shooting incidents you know times when a gun was brandished or fired on school property those graphs really do begin to accelerate around your key date of 2012 and yeah so smartphone use also rises in but it's when Sandy Hook happens and

I certainly remember Sandy Hook as a real horrifyingly watershed moment in this and you begin having more of these active shooter drills in elementary schools so I mean Gen Z kind of this generation is having a lot more safety focus and safety issues is coming of age you know routinely often drilling what will happen if somebody's there in their own school with a gun so I could actually imagine maybe this ricocheting back and forth social media as these issues are being picked up on smartphones and platforms and becoming sort of more in the water but it does feel to me like there is a different political dynamic that younger millennials and certainly Gen Z years are swimming in that might make politics more salient and then of course a Trump era but might make politics more salient and fear more salient you know starting in the smartphone era in a way that matches the the data I'm curious how you think about that interplay I think it's really clear that it's not school shootings because if it were then we wouldn't see the increases in depression and self-harm in countries where school shootings don't exist or much much less common than the horrific great that we experienced them in the United States yet we do see that we see the increases happening around 2012 around the world so I think that does a pretty good job of rolling out that explanation

plus even though maybe if there was a turning point in 2012 well school shootings were a really big deal in the late 90s too and teen mental health issues were improving at that time so I think that also argues against that as an explanation while we're on politics for a minute one interesting wrinkle in the data here is that liberal teens are quite a bit more unhappy have more mental health issues than conservative teens in 2019 to 2021 liberal teens were nearly twice as likely to be depressed as conservative teens you see this even swamping some of the the gender data so you see um liberal boys being more depressed than conservative girls if I remember

this number correctly so why are liberal teens less happy well and that is a it's a very very interesting finding so I dig into that in the book and I think there's a couple of possibilities but the one that I ended up realizing fit the data the best liberal teens spend more time on social media and they have increasingly spent less time with each other face to face and there's a bigger change among liberals in spending time with friends face to face so back in the 70s and 80s liberal teens actually spent more time with their friends face to face than conservative teens and right around 2012 that flipped so there's a bigger decrease among the liberal girls for example so in the end a good amount of that also is probably due to social media because some of the other explanations don't really fit quite as well because you do still see an increase of depression among conservative teens it's just not as large as the increase among liberal teens so some of the other explanations around politics don't fit all

that well so here's two things in that department one is that if you look at the teens who say that they are interested in government and current affairs so those are going to be people who are paying attention you really don't see a whole lot of difference based on those who are paying attention and those who aren't if you break it down by that and by liberal versus conservative the other piece is that you see the exact same pattern in loneliness so loneliness isn't really something you would expect to be that influenced by political ideology per se but it's probably going to be influenced by how much time you spend with your friends versus on social media and the pattern for loneliness and the pattern for depression look pretty much exactly the same if you look at it by gender and by political ideology in terms of it increasing starting you know around 2010 2011 and the increase being larger among liberals than among conservatives

so why would liberal teens be more likely to use social media more than conservative teens if liberal and conservative are basically picking up some other attribute leading to a disparate use of social media what do you think is hiding in the correlation there well liberals you know sometimes called progressives are by definition more comfortable with social change so liberal teens tend to have liberal parents conservative teens tend to have conservative parents then this is a guess but perhaps liberal teens and their parents said hey you know social media spending time online

that's just what kids do now and that's cool that's just the change it's just what what people do now and conservative parents might have been more skeptical and might have had more restrictions on their kids with social media and that same thing could have interacted with the face-to-face social interaction because once teens start as a group anyway start spending a lot more time online than the norm shifts to doing that instead of getting together in person this gets to a set of broader ideas around parenting which I associate not only but substantially with your co-author on some of this work John height who's made the point that we live in a parenting culture that's increasingly oriented towards safety and you you've quite a lot of data about this in the new book that parents today much more so than parents you know a couple decades ago are trying to mow any obstacles out of their kids way you have a great line where you talk about how you know it used to be the 13 year old was a babysitter and now a 13 year old needs a babysitter what do you see in both the data and the changes around parenting itself

I've had to see that playing into this so I think it's important in this case to start with the broader picture that you know the theory that I really start with in the book is that technology is at the root of so much generational and cultural change and that one of the outcomes of technology because we have better medical care is longer lives when people live longer tend to get something that psychologists call the slow life strategy that the entire developmental trajectory slows down from infancy to old age kids are less independent teenagers are less likely to get their driver's license to go out with their friends to drink alcohol to have sex to have a paid job young adults take longer to get married and have kids and settle into a career middle-aged people look and feel younger than their parents and grandparents did at the same age so 60 is the new 50 this type of idea because lives last longer so that trajectory slows down and that's not all bad or all good I mean let's focus on teens for a minute most parents are pretty thrilled that not as many teens are having sex or drinking alcohol but it's not all good because if they also don't go out of the house that much without their parents don't have a driver's license and never had a job that transition to college or the workplace can be challenging they just haven't had as much experience with independence and decision making

so there's trade-offs the slow life strategy is not all good it's not all bad it doesn't mean kids are more responsible or less mature it just means they're taking longer you know to do these adult activities but looking more at the edges we can see some issues that if we have a shift in parenting that's not just okay they're going to take longer to grow up but that's in the mix and we want to protect them from not just physical dangers but experiences then we're starting to run into trouble this is the observation that John Hyatt and Lenore Scanesi have made with their organization let grow that parents who want to give their kids more experience with independence often run afoul of laws and norms that say oh a nine-year-old can't walk a mile by themselves or Lenore's nine-year-old she let take the subway in New York her kid loved it and then she wrote about it and got all kinds of grief from people that that was dangerous and so on I mean this was like 10 15 years ago so this is where you do run into trouble when kids developing independence can be good and can be safe but we have a parenting culture now that says you cannot let your kid out of your sight for one second and that I think many people have argued not really agree takes things too far and does a real disservice to children well there's a weird disconnect here between you can't let your kid out of your sight so there's a lot less of independence out in the real world but then this really expansive independence for fairly young kids in the digital world in part because just harder over long periods of time you know to keep all the kind of parental blockers and not let them be talking to their friends on you know facebook messenger or whatever and so there is this distinction between the real world which does have dangers but I think it's fair to say in most of the data they're overstated in our culture and the digital world which the dangers are if anything understated it seems for teens in in our culture but teens have a lot more freedom to traverse the digital world for hours and hours and hours a day with no supervision while being out in the real world is much more heavily regulated I think that's exactly right and in my previous book iGen which is all about gen z there's one graph that I made which illustrates this and again it's at the extremes but that about 2011 the teen suicide rate exceeded the teen homicide rate for it wasn't the first time but it was the first time I did it for years on end where the two crossed and that mirrors other trends that we see that this generation is physically safer you know they don't get in car accidents as much or fist fights as much or drink alcohol as much but perhaps because they are so unregulated in their time online that's how we have these record levels of depression and suicide and self-harm but there is something narratively weird about this I mean I grew up in you know the 90s and to some degree in the early aughts and I remember the panics of that period as I was I became a professional journalist in 2005 and I still remember that there was a lot of debate over teen pregnancy and abstinence only education and teen drug use and there was a dumb panic over rainbow parties which you can look it up if you'd like to know what those were or what they were purported to be at the very least and we got all these numbers down I mean you know drug use is down and age of sex is up and teen pregnancy is down and and alcohol use is down and smoking is down and you would have thought I think from the discourse of the time that that would have led to an overall improvement in teen well-being and it seems like there's been a very real be careful what you wish for here that if you if you go back I think to the panics of you know the the why are the kids not all right of you know 1999 a lot of that reversed and now the

kids are even worse shape so what do you make of why so many things that we thought were a big problem for kids have gone down and yet it turns out those were maybe correlates of things we actually wanted from them in the real world yeah and you know this is not at all the discount teen pregnancy and alcohol abuse and physical dangers homicide obviously big problems not that these are small homicide is bad let's put that on the table yes let's just make sure you know we're being clear about this these these physical dangers are definitely bad but they are correlates of teens getting together with each other in person and yet sometimes when teens get together with each other in person trouble follows that does happen but the vast majority of the time when teens get together face to face that's good for mental health they're spending time together they're sharing about their experiences they're making sometimes lifelong friendships at the very least you know they're having companionship through the journey of adolescence in high school which is not always an easy time usually is not an easy time and trying to do that online is a pale shadow it is not the same and so yeah we have a lot more kids are here at home not getting into these other types of teenage trouble but that's probably why they're depressed because they're at home in their bedrooms on their phones instead of being with each other in person

I want to look at another theory here so Derek Thompson had a piece in the Atlantic where he was looking at a 2022 paper by Dirk Bethman and Robert Rudolph that found quote higher standardized

test scores and student assessments of academic competition were strongly correlated with teen anxiety if you take two countries that are equivalent in almost every way same GDP inequality life expectancy air pollution the nation with higher test scores and more student competition will have more anxious and depressed teens what do you make of that well to really apply that principle to the stats and teen depression we'd want to look at something that looked at academic pressure over time and we can do that in these big surveys so we can look at time spent on homework for example did time spent on homework suddenly increase around 2012 right as teen depression started to increase and did it keep increasing in fact the opposite is true eighth and tenth graders spend less time on homework in recent years compared to previously the pattern for eighth graders is particularly linear and that's the group where you see the biggest increases in depression and self-harm other measures of academic pressure so there's a question on the big one of the big teen surveys how much competition is there for grades at your school that's also gone down goes up and down a little bit it's not as linear but the overall pattern is teens reporting less academic pressure in recent years then you could say okay well let's look at who's doing the worst and this is among individuals instead of countries so that's one difference from that other study so which group is most likely to be depressed is it the high achievers say those who have an average and are planning to go straight to a four-year college or is it those who do not have a stellar record and are not planning to go to a four-year college it's the low achievers who have higher rates of depression particularly the low achieving girls so I think that theory falls apart pretty quickly at least when you look at the US data over time well let me try to steal man at least the back half of that because I take your point that a lot of things fall apart because they don't explain the time series change but they could be part of the background radiation of this it could be good if you change them it's possible that what war versus is not exactly what caused it so so I don't want to I don't want to hang literally everything on whether or not it explains 2012 and I think on the the flip of that you know you could imagine an explanation and I'd be curious how you think about testing this or absorbing it we're in a world where there is

[Transcript] The Ezra Klein Show / The Teen Mental Health Crisis, Part 1

a lot of competition and where you know particularly post 2008 recession and a much broader societal sense of economic insecurity and precarity that yeah if you're a teenager who's not doing great that it's actually getting scarier and scarier for you and that you know to be in that position and particularly to be in that position in a place where there's a lot of pressure on it right you know you're in a school that does send a lot of kids to four-year colleges to say nothing of you know really highly competitive ones and you're one of the kids not doing well that the sense that you might just be screwed forever is going to be a lot heavier than it would have been at other times because the literal structure of the American economy is making it more likely now that if you don't have a four-year college education from pretty good school you're at a much higher likelihood of being in in real economic despair over time I mean it does feel to me when you look at the the American economy overall that the sense of of education is structuring your entire life is reasonably going up because it reasonably does in fact seem to structure a lot of your future earning potential and so you know the fact that you're not seeing the worst of the effect among the highest achieving kids would I think be natural there yeah and you can you can definitely see it that way and there's probably multiple confounding factors too that the kids aren't who aren't doing well could have you know terrible life at home you know not have any friends that could also lead to depression so there's there's all kinds of possible things going on there but the general idea is you know absolutely worth considering and it is true you know you look at median incomes of those who have a college degree it's considerably higher than those who don't I'm not as convinced for a couple reasons that Gen Z teens are really feeling that though saw a poll the other day there's been a decline in the number of young people who think a college education is completely necessary for doing well that may be because of labor shortages out there right now it could be because they see you know other potential opportunities in other types of careers you know I also think it is really important to keep in mind what the reality is for college admissions because I think there's a really common perception that things are so impossibly competitive now well you know what that is true for the Ivy Leagues and Ivy adjacent schools it's a very small percentage of kids who are aiming to go to those schools so if we're talking about changes in averages it's not really the group that we're going to want to focus on we're going to want to focus on is the kids who maybe do okay in high school well I can't completely speak to other areas of the country but where I live in California the high school my daughter goes to my oldest daughter if you get a 2.5 you're pretty much guaranteed admission to Cal State San Marcos which is the perfectly good even really good school to get your undergraduate degree so if you get some mix of B's and C's you can go there and then let's say you don't you can go to community college there are opportunities it's not that it completely shuts off is there any evidence of downward contagion here so you know generations has a lot of data on on each of the different generations and I'm curious if you're seeing rises in because I think there is some evidence of this rises in anxiety and depression among Gen Xers among you know elder millennials I'm an elder millennial I have young kids now I definitely think that I am part of the cultural dynamic where ideas and structures and frameworks of things like anxiety are more easily at hand and I worry sometimes when I talk to my four-year-old that because I am practiced at recognizing something like anxiety in myself I'm if anything too practiced at offering it as an explanation to him which will make it easier for him to grasp at is there any concern or evidence that something happening here is that the parents are in

[Transcript] The Ezra Klein Show / The Teen Mental Health Crisis, Part 1

worse mental health or have more of these ideas or just have culturally been taught to be that much more responsive to kids feelings and as such are beginning to create more contagion and again recognizing maybe that doesn't explain the 2012 turn but if you imagine that you could have a 2012 turn coming from smartphones and then different cultural dynamics amplifying it if you know kids are getting a bit more depressed and then parents who are more depressed are freaking out about the kids depression much more quickly and then embedding that idea

of that story into them like you could see something like a feedback loop kicking off or the alternative explanation would be if they're more sensitive to it they might be more likely to get their kids mental health treatment and then the depression should be lower because mental health treatment does usually work so yeah there is a generational story here to mental health but it's a little bit of a different one from what you're telling so when I first started looking at the data on saying let's just take clinical level depression it was showing up for teens it began to show up for young adults a couple of years after so 2013 2014 you're seeing it up to the age of about 25 for a while it was not appearing among those ages 26 and over then it did so after about 2015 or 2016 then also start to see a rise in clinical level depression among 26 to 34 year olds it doesn't really appear among those 35 and older just basically not a whole lot going on in terms of rates of clinical level depression between 2005 and 2021 but there's a pronounced increase among 26 to 34 year olds doesn't equal the increase among teens and young adults but it's still there and it's still very striking this is in the millennial chapter of generations and this is a little bit of a mystery because why would it be just these cohorts you know why are we seeing this primarily among those younger than 35 and in another data set it's more that we see it more among those 39 and younger and why does it start to increase the most after 2015 so I go through a few explanations in the book but when I posted some of this on substack I asked people for their ideas because it's very hard to figure out exactly what's going on it doesn't look like it's Trump's election because you see the same pattern in for example the blue state of California versus the red state of Texas and it happens right before he's elected not after my kind of pet theory was that millennials are disappointed by adulthood given their childhood of optimism and confidence and I think that may have some validity here but if that were true what you'd expect is pretty much all millennials say let's take the first group born in the early 80s that you know they would be depressed pretty much as soon as they hit 30 and that's not really what happens you see that much more with those born in the late 80s and especially the early 90s so that made me think it had something more to do with what was happening in the overall culture around that time and I think if you really look back on it that was the time when social medias and the culture at large really started to turn much more negative and the negative news was getting more clicks and it was spreading more and misinformation was starting to gain hold and it just wasn't I don't know I think I think if you look at like the kind of critical mass of pessimism in the country the mid-2000s is where that seems to have begun one set of solutions you often hear have to do with individual or even parental restraint around smartphone use so you know grayscale your phone or set limits on you know the screen time app or utility or you know no phones after 7 p.m you know that kind of thing how do you think about that set of individual either hacks or constraints as an answer to this well I'm of two minds about this I think on the one hand there are things individuals can do

on the other it'd be even better if we had more regulation particularly around social media so there are things that that we can each at least try to do so no phones in the bedroom overnight is my favorite one and that's not just for teens it's for adults too tons of sleep lab studies as we talked about that you're not going to sleep as well that phone is in your bedroom people have a tendency to when they wake up in the middle of the night look at it and then that whole process starts over again with poor sleep and many people's protest to this is yes but I have to have my phone in my bedroom overnight because it's my alarm clock I have some advice for you buy an alarm clock they're cheap you can buy two or three if you're worried then there's other things say so I have three kids we have tried to delay the smartphone as long as possible and to delay social media even further and I do think that is a good idea if the kid really needs a phone get him a flip phone get him a pared down smartphone like a gab phone where you can text and talk and take pictures and that's it there's no ability to download social media or access the internet so there are some things that we can try the difficulty is parental permission isn't needed to get a social media account and kids are supposed to be 13 but age isn't actually verified school laptops have youtube on them at least ours do so there's only so much that individuals can do social media is extremely unregulated and I think the time has come to regulate it more so we can have more of these solutions that are at a group level so just as one example if we raised the minimum age for social media to 16 and required age actually being verified and enforce that social media would be out of middle schools that's already a time developmentally that's very difficult social media makes it worse and then kids would not be able to make the argument which so often happens but everybody I know has snapchat mom then they wouldn't so republican senator josh holly has actually called for a ban on social media use for kids under 16 he cited your research partially in calling for that ban it hasn't gotten I think a ton of momentum but but your view is that's actually worth it that that this is bad enough that we should just lock it out for kids under 16 yeah I do think that there are safer ways better ways for kids 15 and under to communicate with each other than social media which is not designed for children it's not even designed for teens it's designed for adults plus then there's the whole element of why does social media exist it exists because it makes money you know we think it's free it's free in terms of money but us and our children are paying with our time we're paying with our attention and might even be paying with our mental health we've also seen some interesting policies now in the state so utah has been I think particularly aggressive here in late march governor spencer cox he's a republican there he signed two bills so when you put them together utah now requires parental consent before kids can sign up for sites like tiktok and instagram it prohibits kids under 18 from using social media between the hours of 10 30 p.m and 6 30 a.m requires age verification for anyone who wants to use social media in the state tries to prevent tech companies from attracting kids to their apps using addictive features what did you think of that and if you're following it how is implementation going on that yeah so I think these are the types of things we need to be doing just common sense solutions that no we don't want to eliminate social media it certainly has some benefits particularly for adults but there are some steps that we can take to try to make it safer for kids and teens I was genuinely struck when we began looking at who has proposed what here um Arkansas, Texas, Ohio and Louisiana have sort of similar bills that they're thinking about to utah and

so I should say for this point does new jersey but it really is I think it is fair to say at this moment red states and republican members of congress who are willing to be you know to use the old term more paternalistic on this which goes back I think a little bit to our conversation about parenting styles where you know there's possibly a tendency for conservative parents to be more willing to say no I have a rule here and you are a kid and you don't get to decide I'm sure you get a lot of incoming from politicians from governors I'm curious what differences in style and kind of quantity of interest you've seen among republicans and democrats here well it's interesting at least in the senate it's been pretty bipartisan so Richard Blumenthal say has done a lot of work on this there's some other democratic politicians who have done the same for states it's true it seems to have broken down that way more commonly than not but I mean how much do we have right now where there is bipartisan support this is one of the few things that falls under that one thing you're seeing in a bunch of states california where i'm from is one is an approach it's less about you know i would call parental rights or paternalism and more about this idea of holding tech companies accountable focusing on the collection and use of data on privacy how do you think about that I think it's long overdue that you know we have to start thinking a lot more about this business model where on social media you are the product and your data is the product and is that really how we want to be doing things plus then there's all the other issues of how is social media and the internet environment overall affecting politics how is it affecting the national mood I mean we we're discussing this pessimism which seems to be so pervasive now which you know I think it's fairly out of out of step with objective reality and why is it so negative it's all of these things that that's what gets traction on social media and online about any kind of political discussion regardless of any facts about positive things are there other major policies you would want to put into place for mental health and and here putting social media to the side let's say we banned it for everybody under 16 and and kind of did everything else on the list that you would be interested in what other things do you think we could do that would be good for team mental health well I mean that would be a huge step and who knows if it'll ever happen but I have I have my hopes I think that would make an enormous difference you know I think a lot of the other solutions are less straightforward but if there are ways to combat the pervasive negativity that we've been discussing I think that would make a big difference too because obviously the mental health of young people is an enormous concern but in doing further analyses for this new book the other thing that started to really concern me was the extremely high levels of pessimism among young adults not just about their own prospects but about the world it was really stunning to me there was a poll that asked about you know do you think America is a fair society or an unfair society and the majority of young adults said unfair and do we need to make fundamental changes to American government again the majority of young adults said yes and then there was a question do you believe that the founders of the United States are better described as heroes or as villains and four out of ten Gen Z young adults said villains and only 10% of boomers said villains this is a conversation I've had the different times with John Haidt and something I sometimes hear in data like that is a way of thinking that while harder for the individual to bear may in some ways be better for a society so to take the other side of that that argument I mean American society isn't fair it'd be I think ridiculous to look at American society with these levels of inequality these levels of intergenerational you know racial dynamics and call the society here fair how you think of the founders I think people can

differ on that and I probably wouldn't call them villains but I don't know I think you could say that there has been you know in America like in a lot of countries a pressure to sign on to various societal myths that make change more difficult because you know if you have to agree that everything is good then you know why change anything and so maybe in the same way that trends that looked bad when I was a kid like you know teen pregnancy ended up having correlates that later on we sort of felt a little bit better about like kids spending time together in person I wonder if some of the pessimism that you're talking about there doesn't in the more optimistic lead to a generation that when it gets to the crucible of teenager dome is actually a little bit more open to changing or addressing pretty long entrenched inequalities that have been hard to change you know exactly in part because we've been pushed into you know the idea that to say something like America is not fair is to in some way you know insult America as opposed to you know observe something true about America

first of all that one item is probably you know a little less distressing than than the others the one about the fundamental changes depends on how you interpret that I think this is the fork in the road there's arguably two ways that this could play out so first yes we have a generation of young adults who want to change things so if they do that by relatively speaking working within the system we could have very positive outcomes here and so far there's some signs of this so Gen Z young adults are voting at a higher rate than millennials and Gen Xers did at the same age so if they are going to the voting booth and trying to change things to make it more fair that can be a very positive outcome because yeah if you see things as negative then you take the steps to get things changed where I think a lot of people have more concern is if this ends up being more nihilism just almost negativity for negativity's sake and there's nothing we can do and there's some signs of that too so say one of the big surveys of high school seniors has an item every time I try to get ahead something or somebody stops me so that's even more about individuals rather than politics but the percentage who agree with that have gone up so that's an external locus of control so whether you're talking about individual prospects or politics having that kind of defeatist attitude doesn't tend to bode well it is linked to all kinds of bad outcomes you know poor performance at work in school being one example and you can

see that in the political arena too if everybody just throws up their hands said nothing we can really do it's just the way it is things are just terrible and they're getting worse that may not be good but one thing I noticed here that I think is interesting and I wonder if it points towards any other policies is that when we started talking about social media we talked a lot about time displacement more than negativity right that people aren't seeing friends as much in person their social connections are weakening they're not sleeping as much sort of here at the end we're talking more about the stew of negativity and I agree on the stew of negativity I think it's bad but I'm curious on those other things I mean if we think those are powerful it does feel to me like maybe there is more we can do on them I don't exactly know what it would be like what a national program to help people sleep better what actually look like but I wonder if you're beginning to see this creep up the age scale if it doesn't have some of the same effects I mean we've covered loneliness among adults on on other episodes of the show and that that seems to be pretty bad I mean

is that where you begin to look yes depression is starting to creep up the age scale so one thing

[Transcript] The Ezra Klein Show / The Teen Mental Health Crisis, Part 1

I did in the book is to look at time spent in person in a survey of adults because I started looking at this in teens and there has been a decline in in-person socializing among millennials so in this case like 27 to 41 year olds and there's a little bit of a decline among those over the age of 50 for example but not as much so older generations even though they also use social media seem to have not cut back as much on their in-person socializing as young adults and teens have so that might be one of the reasons why we're not seeing as many increases in the mental health issues among those ages 40 and over 50 and over depending on the on the measure but as an overall issue yes you know loneliness is huge so the Surgeon General recently released a report on loneliness with the number of solutions and I think that that would be a place to go to start thinking about this but it's very difficult because there's not a whole lot of low hanging fruit I think in this area and the way that there is around social media and teens it's a lot harder to solve loneliness in the society overall I think it's a good place to end so always our final question what are three books that have influenced you that we would recommend to the audience all right so my first two um get to a lot some of the issues that we've been talking about they both have problem in their title the first is the problem with everything by Megan Dom so I quote that a lot in generations um she's a Gen Xer like myself and her observations about the changes in culture particularly online culture starting in the mid 2010s was very insightful and helped me codify some things that I had been noticing in terms of the split between Gen Xers and Millennials particularly the Gen Xers pride themselves on being tough and resilient and that that is not as prized by later generations then the second is called what's our problem by Tim Urban and this is one of the best nonfiction books I have read in a very long time it has a really amazing structure for understanding some of the polarization and division that we are really observing right now in American politics and culture so has the really interesting rubric that's not just right and left in politics that there's upper in terms of talking about ideas and lower in terms of just kind of being people over the head that was a very fascinating way to think about the the structure of American politics and it goes much broader than that into all the issues so the third is for fun it's a fiction book called nine ladies and it is Pride and Prejudice meets Outlander and a great plot and great consideration of what would happen if in 1987 born Elizabeth Bennett ended up in Mr. Darcy's time and then the author takes it from there. Gene Twangy your new book is called Generations thank you very much. Thank you this episode of the Ezra Klein Show is produced by Annie Galvin fact-checking by Michelle Harris and Mary March Locker mixing by Jeff Gelb our production team is Emma Fogau Annie Galvin Jeff Gell to Roger Karma and Kristen Lin original music by Isaac Jones audience strategy by Shannon Busta the executive producer of New York Times opinion audio is Annie Rose Strosser and special thanks to a fiend Shapiro and Christina Samilowski