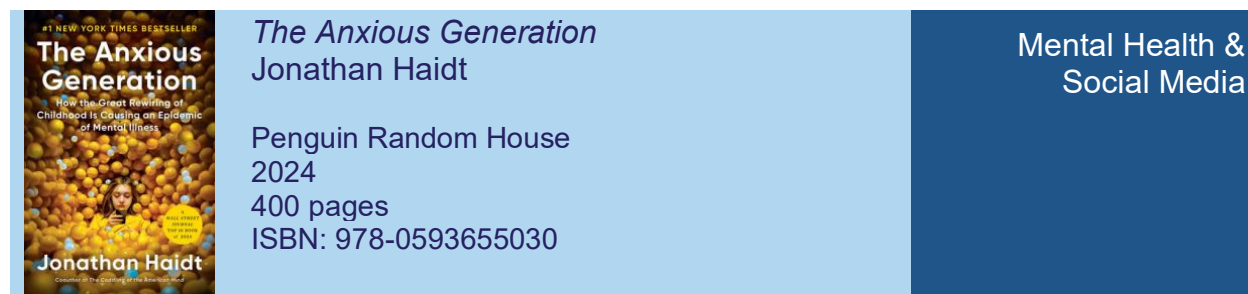


Discussion Guide



Summary

In *The Anxious Generation*, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt (pronounced “height”) lays out the facts about the epidemic of teen mental illness that hit many countries at the same time. He then investigates the nature of childhood, including why children need play and independent exploration to mature into competent, thriving adults. Haidt shows how the “play-based childhood” began to decline in the 1980s, and how it was finally wiped out by the arrival of the “phone-based childhood” in the early 2010s. He presents more than a dozen mechanisms by which this “great rewiring of childhood” has interfered with children’s social and neurological development, covering everything from sleep deprivation to attention fragmentation, addiction, loneliness, social contagion, social comparison, and perfectionism. He explains why social media damages girls more than boys and why boys have been withdrawing from the real world into the virtual world, with disastrous consequences for themselves, their families, and their societies.

Questions

1. The book says that today we overprotect children and adolescents in the real world and underprotect them in the virtual world. Do you see this happening? Where?
2. The book says that one problem with a phone-based childhood is that it replaces the hours children would otherwise spend playing in the real world: “Children are, in a sense, deprived of childhood.” Do you agree about this for children in general or your own? What exactly are kids missing out on?
3. Modern technology makes it very easy to track our children’s whereabouts, grades, and even behavior electronically. This can become “the world’s longest umbilical cord.” How is this beneficial? How is this detrimental?
4. What problems do smartphones, social media, and screens solve in your own life and what problems do they create?
5. How are you different online and offline?
6. Do you have any tech rules for yourself? Do they work?
7. What would you like to change, if anything, about your own relationship with smartphones and social media? What about video games and other screen-based activities?

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