**SESSION THREE: FAITH AND MENTAL HEALTH IN AN iGEN WORLD with Jean Twenge**

Josh Good:

Can we start please with Andrew Hanauer, Alayna Treene and Sewell Chan.

Andrew Hanauer:

Hi, I'm so glad I get to pretend to be journalist. This is exciting. I missed the first part of your presentation. So I apologize if you covered this, but I've been convinced as I raise an 11 year old girl that our only hope is to band with other parents and basically create a circle. Has anyone done that successfully?

Dr. Jean T.:

There is a grassroots group called Wait Until 8th, based out of Austin, Texas, and their idea is just that, to have parents form groups or say the kids are friends or at the same school and they will all agree that their kids are not going to get phones until eighth grade. I would go more like 10th grade, but I think they have the right idea because this is, especially in the last year or so where my thinking has gone on this issue, that individual level solutions that we can do, parents can do with their own kids can only be so effective. They can only take it so far because if your kid's the only one without social media and your kid is the only one without smartphones, and that's my kid by the way, my oldest, who's turning 15 in a few weeks and is in ninth grade.

She's literally the only kid, as far as she knows, at her school who doesn't have a smartphone. I told her that means she won. Fortunately she agrees and she's cool with it, but it can make things difficult. Even my 12 year old. So those group level solutions, whether they're through government or parents or at schools who say no phones during the school day…Maybe we need to raise the age limit for social media. It's 13 and it's not even enforced right now to 16 or 18. We need to have more parents come together and say we're all going to agree, we're just not going to do this right now because it has to be at the level of the group.

I think that's where a lot of these effects are. We have the dose response curve with individuals, but I think a lot of the effects are at the group. Even if you don't use social media and you're a teen girl in particular, you're affected by the culture of it and you're left out if you do and then you have mental health problems. Facebook's own research shows not just this but those mental health issues, body image issues by being on social media. So you can't win. And that's what teens tell me. I feel like I can't win. I hear that all the time.

Josh Good:

Let's go next to Melinda Henneberger from the Kansas City Star editor.

Melinda Henneberger:

So, we know so much more about the brain now and its development. How does the impact of social media, being online, on the young brain differ from the impact on an adult brain?

Dr. Jean T.:

I'll say this with the caveat that I'm not a neuroscientist and I haven't done brain research on this topic. I've read some of it. Now, those links to depression and unhappiness and loneliness with more time on social media do appear among adults too.

Brian Primack, who's an MD and a Dean of Health Sciences at University of Arkansas, has done a lot of that stuff with young adults and shown very similar relationships, but you can definitely make that argument that it's even more concerning for younger people, because their brains are more plastic and more changeable and everything that you do affects the brain. And that's even more true at those younger ages, just because there's those critical periods. And adolescence is a really critical period for social interaction. So I think that's one of my fears and many other people as well, is that if they're not getting that face to face social interaction during adolescence, that takes a lot of hours of practice. And as they don't get that during that time, you're missing that critical period.

It's really early days in terms of any of the research on the brain. The ABCD Study, which is a longitudinal study, the first wave of it is out, their second wave should be out soon, is going to try to answer that exact question.

That's one of their main things. So they're getting 10,000 kids. They started with nine to 10 year olds, and they're following them over time. They're looking at their media use and all kinds of other are factors in doing brain scans. It's an incredible study. So the preliminary evidence from that study suggests that there are some brain changes in kids who spend more time in technology, but the researchers said, we don't know yet what these differences mean.

They could be positive, could be negative, we're not sure. That was their statement. But given that everything you do changes the brain and even more so at that age, I think it's a very reasonable presumption to say that there has to be differences given the way kids grow up now versus how they grew up even 15 years ago.

Josh Good:

Can I suggest that we go to both Alayna Treene from Axios and Eleanor Barkhorn from the New York Times respectively. We'll do two at one time. Try to keep the questions moving.

Alayna Treene:

I'm curious if we're starting to see the pendulum swing back, especially as you know, the work that you're doing and others, on seeing the impact of social media and smartphones on mental health. I'm curious, and I keep saying, I hope that by the time I have kids, this is less of a trend than it is now. I'm curious what we've seen as we've learned more about the effects of social media.

Eleanor Barkhorn:

Yeah, I am super interested in this, wait till eighth or 10th movement, and was sort of interested in, along with the negatives of not having a smartphone, not being social media until those ages.

What can parents and communities do to fill in that time that, if phones have replaced certain activities, if we take the phone away, how do we reintroduce those activities into the lives of the children in our community?

Dr. Jean T.:

At least in the data we have up through 2019, there hasn't really been a slowing down in those increases of time spent on social media or online. It keeps increasing. Increase might be leveling off, but it's not going down. Now, the work that the Wheatley Institution funded, where we got some survey data in 2020, there was a lot of fear that kids increased their social media use, really radically increase the amount of time, even leisure time and clearly increased school time online, but leisure time. And that didn't really pop, at least in the data that we had.

They actually were spending slightly less time on social media. They're spending more time on video chat, which is good, because that's actually real time social interaction. It's not as good as in person, but it's a lot better than say scrolling through social media.

But certainly there's been much more discussion about this among parents in the last few years. I always hate trying to predict the future because there's a good chance you could be wrong, but right now with this attention on Facebook and their internal research, I think this might be a turning point. Because it's really brought it to the forefront. I think it has helped quell some of the doubts that people have had. There's been a lot of people who have said, "Well, kids are online anyway, there's nothing we can do about it." And, "Oh, it's probably not so bad."

Well Facebook's own research shows actually, yeah, it is that bad and more. And there's more congressional attention being paid to it and more parents paying attention to it.

So I think we are at that moment of reckoning. What exactly will happen? It's really hard because if all your friends are online, then what are you going to do?

So I think it has to be those group solutions of parents, of communities, of schools having those discussions and teens themselves. Before the pandemic, I would travel to college campuses and at school districts and so on, and the Long Beach School District had this great program where they had kind of like a teen advisory board and they would talk over, hey, what should we do at school to try to help people manage technology better? And of course, because they lived this all their life, they had the coolest ideas. They were like, yeah, actually we shouldn't have phones during the school day.

It was the parents who actually protested that, which was interesting. The teens themselves said, yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Then when I'm talking to my friend at lunch, I don't have to be afraid that she's going to pull out her phone. Right? So they like this idea. And I've seen a lot in the last few months to more young people speaking out on this issue. There's an organization called LOG OFF. It's a 19 year old college student from Washington University in St. Louis, Emma Lembke, I think her name is, but if you look at the LOG OFF movement, it's online and she had terrible experiences on Instagram and wants to start a movement of more young people saying we're not going to use these platforms.

It's tough though, because those platforms are of course designed to bring people back. Some people have made the argument, those platforms are designed to be addictive. So that is the problem. And it's their social, social media is social. So you have to have those group level solutions and those are harder to implement, but that's the only way things are going to change, I think.

Josh Good:

Naomi Ishisaka from the Seattle Times and Will Saletan from Slate.

Naomi Ishisaka:

You had said individual level solutions could only be so effective. And you talked a little bit about some school level, district level solutions. Are there policy changes that you think would be effective in order to change this trajectory?

Will Saletan:

So just to play devil's advocate here, you opened your presentation with the difference in the periods in terms of a protection of children. We've become much more protective of children. We used to let kids grow up on their own, discover their independence, make decisions. Some of them were bad decisions, but they learned how to be autonomous.

Dr. Jean T.:

Right.

Will Saletan:

I guess what I'm going to ask you is what is the best version of that argument applied to smartphones?

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah.

Will Saletan:

What's the best evidence for it? What's the best version of how we would manage it as opposed to forbid it. And what do you think of that argument?

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah. I fully recognize this, that John Hide who's become my collaborator, of course, one of his arguments is we need to give kids more freedom, but then when it comes to technology, you're like, well maybe they need to actually have less freedom. So I think it depends a lot on the context and what we're talking about here. I think it's also, to get to your question, that the online world is, at the moment, so incredibly unregulated compared to the rest of life. Those strides that we've made in protecting children, sometimes they have gone too far. Absolutely. I think there's a law in Illinois that says that you can't leave your kid at home alone until they're 16. I mean, how lame is that?

And there's just high profile cases of parents who let their ten year old and six year old walk home from the park a mile away, and child protective services shows up. So clearly there's been overreach in some of these areas, but there's also been things that have made an enormous difference for the safety of

kids and teens. So raising the drinking age to 21, being one example of that. Some of the laws are on driver's licenses. Graduated driver's licenses, and so on are one of the reasons why car accidents have gone down so much among teens.

So we have to be cautious about overreach, but on the other hand with social media and phones, it's pretty much a total free-for-all. The age minimum, according to the 1998 COPPA law, is 13 for having social media in your own name, but no verification is used. You can go in and just check the box or put your birthday in. So there's kids under the age of 12 on there all the time.

So recently Wall Street Journal, on one of their articles pointed out that in a conversation with the head of Instagram, Jojo Siwa, who was 18 said that she had been on Instagram for a decade. In other words, starting at eight years old. And clearly wasn't kicked off the platform. So yeah, that's a problem. It just hasn't been enforced because nobody's made them enforce it.

And then, of course, the argument from the tech companies, well, how can we enforce that? Well, my answer is that's your problem. It's the law, enforce it. And 13 is a developmentally very challenging time for social media to be introduced. So maybe we need to raise that to 16 or 18 and just in the spirit of raising the drinking age and these other things that have had such positive benefits, maybe we need to do with some online platforms.

And then the other policy I'll mention, I said this briefly earlier, of no phones during the school day. Bell to bell. So having a phone before and after school, clearly useful for getting to school, for coordinating things, but why do kids need to have their phone during the school day?

And some people say, well, what if their parents need to get in touch with them? I don't know, call the office Gen Xers, we got away with it. We lived without having them.

Seriously, and you don't need to text your kid and say, what do you want for dinner? Do it at 3:30. I don't know. So there's ways around this. And that would help with two areas. First, less distraction in the classroom. Any high school teacher would tell you that that would be fantastic, if their kids had to put their phone in their locker, or in a locked pouch, or in the office, you know, bell to bell. And then the other benefit is lunch period.

The kids might actually talk to each other face to face. So if you go to a middle school or a high school where they're allowed to access their phones during lunch, they're eerily quiet. They're not talking to each other. And especially now after 18 months of the pandemic where they weren't going to school, many of them were not going to school face to face for a very long time. They need that. They need that development of social skills and lunch period, 40 minutes or so when they can do that, if they can't use their phones. And again, it has to be the group solution because, this works for adults. `You know what, one person pulls out their phone, everybody pulls out their phone. But teens themselves will say, if we want to have a face to face conversation, maybe we'll all go out to dinner and then we'll all put our phones in the center of the table. And the first one to reach for her phone has to pay the bill for the whole group.

Debra Saunders:

Hi Jean, thanks for coming to this. This is really fascinating. And it's funny, literally the last column that I wrote before coming here was about how there were not individual solutions to the Facebook problem after the realizations of last week.

But I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about if you have research on whether certain forms of tech and social media or certain sites are better and worse than others. You mentioned video chat being actually kind of good, is Tinder worse than.. Tumblr worse than TikTok, better than Instagram?

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah. So there's not a ton of academic research distinguishing between different social media platforms. I think Facebook's own research points toward Instagram being particularly problematic, which does make a lot of sense. Instagram at base is a site where people post pictures of themselves and invite other people to comment on them. You know, kind of makes sense that that would be problematic, particularly for teen girls. And Snapchat and TikTok are more immediate, they're more fun. They're more focused on being silly or dancing and those things. So I think there may be some differences there. There are some academic studies suggesting that Instagram has those issues around body image that the Facebook research shows too. But I know of only one paper, that's not even published that, and it was college students, not teens, that looked at different platforms and the authors not ready to release that yet.

So we need more on that for sure, but different activities that we know more. So both US and UK data, general internet time and social media are much more strongly linked to depression and self harm and low self esteem than gaming or watching videos and watching TV. So that split is pretty clear. And then video chat, there's not a ton of data on that, but you saw that late to happiness. It's pretty much a wash there, so it's not as good as face to face, but it doesn't have as strong of a link as social media or internet use.

Speaker 9:

I was a huge fan of Generation Me. I remember writing about it at the time. And I was wondering if there's any way you can link these two things because in the sense, these are the children of Generation Me with the narcissism and all the things that you described that were very alarming about that. Is there some kind of continuity or is this a consequence of that generation?

Dr. Jean T.:

A lot of times with generational differences as a question I get all the time, is it the parents' fault? And I don't like fault and blaming because it's a big cultural changes. We're all in it together. And it's not just parents. It's clearly a lot of these other influences, but I do think there is a symbiotic relationship between individualism, and that's what I was really writing about in Generation Me. So more focused on the self, less focus on social rules and technology.

I mean at a really basic cultural and social change level technology makes individualism possible. We're going back a lot farther than smartphones here. I'm writing in a book right now, tentative title is Generations. Taking a broader look at all six living American generations, where they were, where they are now and what will come in the future.

And it's kind of put me in this mindset of thinking more broad picture about these things that you think about as recently as the 1930s. How if you wanted to go and move out of your parents' house and live on your own, unmarried, you wouldn't even have a washing machine. Washing machines made a big impression on me when I was thinking about this.

That it's incredible how different the world is based on these labor saving technologies and all these communication technologies. So I think these things go hand in hand, that individualism builds technology, technology builds individualism, and that we do have somewhat of an interaction with those things. Because the way we use technology is very individualistic when in a different cultural place with different cultural values, you might not use it in that way. But I don't really think that these trends are, say, from more kids having narcissistic parents. That could be a small part of it, but I think the change in their own lives that technology has created are probably have a bigger impact on them.

Debb Saunders:

Yeah. This is kind of related to Christine's question. I'm just trying to understand more because obviously all the grown up girls in this room know that early teen girls are mean and horrible to each other. So what specifically are the behaviors that girls are doing online that are, I know there's not great science, but just because you've thought about it so much, what can we extrapolate? What do you know about... Is it the bullying? You've mentioned comparing photos a lot. So that one I get, but I just interested in more of your thoughts about the specific ways that girls are harming each other and themselves by being online.

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah. There is the bullying aspect and I'll get to that. But it's also that they're comparing themselves to their friends and to celebrities and to influencers. And of course coming up short, because so many of those photos are photoshopped or they took 200 of them to get just the right one. And they only show the good things in life. And it's a platform that's filled with beautiful people, beautiful bodies. And almost everybody looking at it feels like they can't compare.

So it is that individual experience as well. And then you put the social aspect into it. So, bullying among girls at that age was bad enough when it was through the slam book where they'd write in the notebook and then pass it around. Basically you imagine that and then everybody can see it.

The other thing that occurs is through the follower count and the likes count that you get on Instagram, popularity becomes a number. So it's any high school at any time probably you can be like, oh she's popular and she's not. But now it's a number, it's quantifiable. It kind of brings it to the next level. And then with the like counts, there's, oh, well they didn't like this thing that I did or they didn't like this picture of me. What's wrong with me?

So it's this spiral, that's what the Facebook research talks about. They referred to it as a grief spiral of these emotions that teen girls feel. So there's all of these things going on, that it takes those dynamics that have always been there with girls and body image, and girls and social bullying, and just puts them on this public platform that's always there. And that's the other element that people have noted with

cyber bullying, is if you get bullied at school where you can go home and get away from that, and now you can't get away from it. It's 24/7. It's always there on the phone.

Josh Good:

Okay. Well ladies and gentlemen, if we can go one more round. First, I have a clarification that I probably didn't communicate quite the right way at the beginning in describing Jean's front end presentation. Everything that you just heard is on the record, including her talk. So you're welcome to write about any pieces of what she shared.

Carl Cannon:

I have two questions and they're unrelated. They both relate to what you said, but they're different kind of questions. The first one is, at the very beginning, you showed some slides that showed that how people used to parent and they had larger families, and that's how I grew up out here, and my mother actually used to joke, go play in traffic. And we would just be gone all day long playing.

Dr. Jean T.:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Carl Cannon:

And I remember I walked to school two, three miles, junior high school, a couple miles each way. That's how we grew up. And my question is, could that be one of the reasons that today's children are less happy, but because they miss having big families and freedom? That's my first question.

Dr. Jean T.:

The time sequence doesn't line up as precisely with technology, because as you saw, those trends started more like late 1990s and then kept going. So I think it's possible. It does have something to do with it. Maybe particularly at some of the older ages where it's the young adults. So I still think the technology is the primary piece because of the timing of the trends and because so many of those mental health trends are showing up among 10 to 14 year olds, you know, the self harm, right? Because at that age, it's not going to be as impactful that you haven't had that freedom.

But by 18 or 20, when you realize, well, I don't know how to make any of these decisions on my own. And again, this is what I hear on college campuses all the time. That student affairs people say I have more and more students who can't make even simple decisions without texting my mom and dad. And I think that's when it hits for a lot of people is when they get to that point, when they are still expected to become adults.

And then it's very hard because they haven't had as many of those experiences with independence. So I do think it is a possibility, but it's a weird thing because you take high school students and you think, well, are they staying at home and not getting the driver's license, and not going out because their parents don't let them?

More often than not, apparently it's the kids' idea. For one thing they're fighting with their parents less than Gen Xers did at the same age. And we know that from the national data. And you think, you start a

fight with your teenager who has a driver's license, like take their car keys away, right? And that's kind of effectively what's happened to almost the whole generation and fewer of them were driving, Yet, they're like, okay, cool. And I found that in interviews for the book too. It really blew me away. There was one kid I interviewed who said that said, "Well, I didn't get my driver's license in high school because my parents didn't push me to get my driver's license." And I'm like, "What are you talking about?" I'm like, it is the other way around. That's the Gen X viewpoint and maybe even the millennial viewpoint. That was enlightening. And I think that's kind of-

Carl Cannon:

You're saying it's intuitive, but it doesn't quite correlate when it all hit the fan time-wise.

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah, that's the other piece of it, but I mean... It is, it's challenging this area of research to nail it down because you can't do the experiment to try to mess around with those things and change one and not the other and see what has the bigger effect. Because you could make a tipping point argument that, oh, well, when a few more kids weren't getting their driver's license, they weren't going out as much, maybe it didn't have as much of an effect, but then it had a bigger effect once it crossed a certain threshold, or something like that. You might be able to make that argument.

I think it's in the mix with some of these mental health things, but I still think it's the technology that's the primary one, especially with the younger kids.

Carl Cannon:

Thank you. Second question, a pollster that some of these people know, John Della Volpi, he's been polling young people at the Institute of Politics at Harvard for like 20 years, college students.

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah.

Carl Cannon:

And he's writing a book, it's not out yet, but he's very pro this generation, he's an evangelists for them and he defends them and he brags about them. He uses Gen Z, I think so he can say Zoomers, because he likes that. But if he was here, what he'd say is, look, if this generation is so narcissistic, why do they vote in record numbers?

Dr. Jean T.:

First of all, they're not narcissistic.

Carl Cannon:

I was going to say, because they volunteer in record numbers and they vote more than young people that voted when they turn 18. What does that mean?

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah. Okay. The narcissism turned around in college students samples right at the great recession. It shows a different pattern than some of these other trends, the change happened a little earlier. But you saw self-esteem going down too and that's related to narcissism. All those indicators... The big issue with iGen is not narcissism, it's depression. Millennials-

Carl Cannon:

But they're doing these things, they're volunteering in record numbers. Isn't that a good sign?

Dr. Jean T.:

Well, it's because it's required. It's required to graduate from high school to do volunteer work, and it didn't used to be, that's why volunteering has gone up.

Carl Cannon:

It's not really volunteer work.

Dr. Jean T.:

Right.

Carl Cannon:

If you're forced to do it.

Dr. Jean T.:

Right. And the other thing is, if you look at interest in politics in the national surveys, it's lower than it was for boomers, for example. A lot lower than it was from boomers. It's lower than it was for Gen X-ers. Interest in politics and civic affairs, it's pretty low.

Now, voting, take voting in presidential elections. You compare those every four years. Up until 2020 was pretty stable. It was really high when 18 year olds first got the right to vote in, what was it? The '72 election?

Carl Cannon:

That's right.

Dr. Jean T.:

It was very high there and then it kind of went down. But if you kind of... And I have this graph in iGen about voter participation, it really didn't change a whole lot. Now, 2020, it did go way up, but it went way up for all ages. Probably because of mail voting and just being easier to vote.

Speaker 7:

I apologize, I have a three-part question. The first is, I'm really curious about to what extent there are nuances... And one of the graphs that you showed that broke it down on gender, but also socioeconomic division. Because it seems to me a lot of the behaviors you're describing, like having your parents drive you to school, whatever, to have parents who have time to drive and care enough to do that, so...

Dr. Jean T.:

The trends are pretty much the same.

Speaker 7:

Interesting.

Dr. Jean T.:

Because I had the same theory. I kind of wondered that would be the case. It may be the things that we can measure in terms of the speed of development, but going out, driver's licenses, the alcohol, all of it looks really similar across socioeconomic status.

Now, the survey doesn't have the world's greatest measure of socioeconomic status, but it does have parental education, so we can at least look at that and it looks really similar.

Speaker 7:

Cool.

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah.

Speaker 7:

Okay. To what extent does this correlate with, kind of just in general quantification, of high school performance? I have friends who work in ed tech who are introducing technology into all the ways that high schoolers are evaluated and it just seems like they can't escape it.

Dr. Jean T.:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 7:

And it's not necessarily their own social media use, because also teachers are encouraged to say, "Oh, make an Instagram post or compose a tweet." Or whatever. And then third question is, how does climate play into this?

Dr. Jean T.:

Do you mean that teachers are encouraging kids to be on social media and use technology in school projects? Is that what you-

Speaker 7:

That's part of it-

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah.

Speaker 7:

... but also, just in general, if you know that it's harder to get into college than ever before, whatever... Basically they're being evaluated at every moment in these really rigorous ways that integrate the very technology that is causing this depression. It just seems to me like this is another element of it and I'm curious how that plays into this.

Dr. Jean T.:

I'm not sure if this is what you're asking, but I've heard... Because I heard this theory for a while, oh, they're more depressed because there's more academic pressure. Well, they're spending actually less time on homework, about the same amount of time on extracurricular activities, the trends show up even among kids who say that they aren't going to go to college, so I think you can certainly make the case that among certain segments, and maybe at certain schools, there's more academic pressure. And some elite colleges are harder to get into, but more high school students go to college now than did 20 years ago. There's more opportunities to do that. It's just that certain flagship schools and elite schools are hard to get into, but that's a very small percentage of high school students who are aiming for those institutions. Again, you have to think of the broader picture.

Speaker 7:

Yeah. Certainly in the elite institutions, but in general, this kind of integration of technology in education practices. And my friend works in the Florida public school system and it's a San Francisco tech company that's going into these public school districts and kind of organizing their entire evaluation system so that's what I'm wondering about.

Dr. Jean T.:

And things like No Child Left Behind, that means more standardized testing. I mean, it is true that there certainly has been a shift toward more evaluation and more interest or around those things. It could play a role, I think. I think you'd have to make a case that that would be linked to depression, which as you saw, homework time wasn't really linked to happiness. And then you'd have to make a case for the timing lining up.

Josh Good:

I know we want to go next to Hal Boyd and then Deb Saunders, but there was a question that came up during the break about the happiness slides that you showed. Those numbers, the 0.5 and one in one direction, what's that mean in terms of how much they were leaning, bending, toward happiness versus depression?

Dr. Jean T.:

There's a number of ways to look at associations between two variables. My academic paper's on that. There's two main ways that you can do it. You can look at correlation, which is a linear relationship from one to the other or you can do what is more often done in medical journals of setting it up as relative risk.

And relative risk is, it's more intuitive because it puts it in terms of percentages and it's easier to wrap your mind around how big or small the change is, in my view, if you put it in terms of relative risk. That's why I had it set up that way.

One of them had the internet, and that particular slide... And this is explained in the book as well, kids who are on the internet 20 hours a week versus those who are on the internet less than that, the kids who are on 20 hours a week, 45% more likely to say that they're unhappy. In both of those cases, it's... Sorry for the jargon, but a dichotomous variable, in this case, I didn't do it as the happiness scale. It's, did you say that you were unhappy or did you say that you were very happy or pretty happy? Putting those in two categories, and then I did the same with the time use, above or below a certain cutoff. And there's advantages and disadvantages to that approach as well as to doing it in terms of correlation, but that's how it's set up. It's comparing those two groups and then you look at what percentage says they're unhappy in one group versus another, and then you calculate the difference. That's the idea.

And then worries around climate change. Are you thinking in terms of the mental health trends or something else?

Speaker 7:

Yeah.

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah. I've heard that theory presented. I think there's a couple problems with it. I'm not saying it's completely false, but I think there's problems with relying on that as the main driver. First, if that was the case, why would the trends be stronger among 10 to 14 year olds than 17 to 18 year olds, and young adults, who would presumably be more aware of these issues?

And second, timing is a big problem because if you look in these big data sets at say awareness around environmental issues, what are you doing to help the environment in your day-to-day life? Those peaked in the seventies and the nineties, not recently. The idea that awareness of environmental issues is a new thing, that's a false narrative. Gen Xers And boomers had many moments of those awareness's as well. And in those surveys, that's where you see the peaks, not recently.

Hal Boyd:

Thank you for the presentation, for being here. Long admired your work and grateful for you taking the time. We've talked a little bit about different solutions, the wait till eighth and something else about banding together to try to stave off-

Dr. Jean T.:

The logoff movement founded by a college student.

Hal Boyd:

Obviously in Utah we have a lot of younger people, perhaps this is felt most acutely in Utah than maybe anywhere else, just because of the relative youth of the state. And we have a lot of billboards for alternative phones, Gabb phone, and what some might characterize as dumb phones. I find that offensive, but I wonder if you've looked into any of those and how effective they are. This is maybe hyper personal, as I start to see my oldest inch toward teenage years, whether I should buy a Gabb phone, but curious to see if those kinds of solutions are effective or if you've looked into them.

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah. I think you can definitely make an argument that if, for convenience's sake, if you need to get your kid a phone, yeah, get them a flip phone. It's a hard sell sometimes with kids though. I offered my oldest daughter when she was in seventh grade, didn't have a smartphone and I wasn't willing to get her one, but I said, "I'm willing to consider getting you a flip phone." And she said, "Mom, a flip phone is more embarrassing than no phone." So she had no phone, but she had a friend who moved... We lived in San Diego, her best friend moved to Maryland and we were close with their family and she wanted to go visit. She wanted to fly alone on the plane, which I was totally good with. Building that independence, always a good thing and she's the kind of kid who just thrives on that. But that's the situation where, yeah, having a phone would be a really good idea. That's what we did, we got her basically a drug dealer phone, a burner phone. Every summer we've gotten her a burner phone and that's what she uses when she takes her cross country trip. And then she hands it back to us, take this away, I don't want this, it's embarrassing.

Yeah, I think you can make those arguments of trying to get technology that has some of the advantages and not the disadvantages. And that could be a Gabb phone, a flip phone, a dumb phone, or it could be a smartphone that you locked down. That's the other thing, there are really good parental controls now, there didn't use to be. But on Apple phones, Android phones, they have built in parental controls. It's just most parents don't know they exist. You have to go in and mess with them and it takes some learning, but they're there.

I like the flip phone idea just because it's so simple, but if you're going to give the kid a smartphone you should be using those parental controls because the average age to get a smartphone is now 10 and most parents are just handing that phone to that kid without putting any of those guardrails on, and that's problematic for a lot of reasons. On those parental controls, you can have the phone... You can do some laptops too, have it shut down at night, then there's not the temptation to be on in the middle of the night, can help with sleep. You can block downloading apps. You can set time limits on certain apps. Say your kid's 15 and really wants to be on TikTok or on Snapchat. Okay, you can have Snapchat, but you can have it for half an hour a day, use it well. Or an hour a day, or whatever limit is reasonable. And it has to be a hard limit, it can't be just a reminder, those tend not to work. But that phone becomes a brick at bedtime and you can't use it until the next morning or Snapchat just doesn't work anymore, sorry.

What I like about that too is then you're mad at the phone instead of the parent, even if it was the parent who put on the limit.

Josh Good:

Deb Saunders, syndicated columnist.

Deb Saunders:

I feel sort of cheesy because I'm going to bring politics into this, and it's been really nice having this conversation without it. This morning I was watching the whistleblower testify. The 60 Minutes interview, she wants to internet to be safe. Now, I'm not talking about what happens in other countries, and the counter-intelligence, and January 6th, but I'm trying to understand when they talk about having the internet be safe, what that means. I wonder how iGen kids... They want more controls, they want to

have more moderators. Is that the feeling? And what do you think about section 230 and how does all this work? I mean, I fear censorship of political speech could come from this and that's sort of where I'm going to-

Dr. Jean T.:

Fill me in on section 230 so I make sure we're on the same page.

Deb Saunders:

Oh, great. I just pulled it up before I talked. I mean, basically you'd be treated like a newspaper publisher.

Dr. Jean T.:

Okay.

Deb Saunders:

Right. Is that... Yeah.

Speaker 11:

You can be sued.

Deb Saunders:

You can be sued.

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah. That I probably can't really speak to, but the other aspect, what do teens want? I think that's a really good question that needs to be asked in this arena. I mean, opinions are going to differ. There's going to be some kids who are going to be like, no, I want to do whatever I want, get out of my face.

But that is kind of to my surprise, at first, when I first started visiting colleges and high schools, and talking to kids and doing interviews, that's not the majority opinion. I really expected when I did interviews for the book, even when I was doing talks, I was a little afraid that the reaction of kids was going to be, "Oh man, it's another old person, doesn't understand technology." And that was not the reaction I got.

Now, they would ask good pressing questions. Oh, correlation versus causation. I'm like, "Yes. Awesome. You rock." That was good. And there was someone, "What if you need to learn it for work?" They asked great questions about it. But what I got more often was okay, if that phone is going to interfere with my sleep, what exactly do I need to do? And then, okay, if social media isn't great for mental health, well, what do I do because all my friends are on it all the time and if I'm not commenting or liking, they think I'm mad at them. And so they want these practical solutions. And more and more, iGenners are coming up with these themselves, some of these movements where they're founded by young people themselves saying, "We need to do something about this."

And that's what I was seeing pre-pandemic when I was doing these trips, all the time. Schools would say, let's have a day without phones, or something like that. It's a little impractical. It's kind of hard to pull off. But if you have the whole school say, hey, we're going to take, not a day, maybe more like a week, off of social media and see what happens.

Schools are doing that and kids come back from it or they take scheduled trips with the school and they have to leave their phones at home, there's some of those. And kids hate it at first and then after three days they think it's the best thing that ever happened to them. And I heard that story everywhere I went. It's like any addiction, the first day you got the shakes and then the second day you still are not so sure this is great. And then by the third day, it's very freeing, and that's how they reflected on it too.

Deb Saunders:

You see this coming from within, that people are hitting the point where they're sated and they're trying to change it themselves?

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah. Not all of them, definitely not all, but a sizeable group of young people themselves, they recognize that this is a problem.

Deb Saunders:

The whistleblower, she talked about how her caregiver got sucked into all this really toxic stuff online and he became a white nationalist. I lost somebody to that sort of thing. What organic thing is coming from people themselves about dealing with that? Or do you think we have to have a workforce of people monitoring and kicking people off? What do you think?

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah. I mean, I don't have as much expertise in that piece of it, of some of the radicalization and the misinformation, and so on, in social media, it's a little out of my purview. I mean, I think you're going to get, generally speaking, the most buy-in for regulations around children and teens.

Deb Saunders:

Sure.

Dr. Jean T.:

I mean, I think for most things that's the natural place to start, but I completely agree that some of these other problems are just as important. They're going to be even harder to solve though is my guess.

Josh Good:

Quick moderators privilege for one last, what is your best piece of advice for those of us who have to be on Twitter for work? Who use Twitter regularly to source stories-

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah, I use Twitter too.

Josh Good:

Yeah.

Dr. Jean T.:

God, I wish I didn't, but it's similar. I have made academic connections through Twitter. There have been good things that have come out of it. I've learned about a lot of research that way, but it is so hard because it feels addictive at so many points. Taking a break from it on vacation, and at other times, I think has been really productive. My own personal rule for Twitter is that I do not have it on my phone or my tablet, and I think that's been a big help. I have it on my desktop computer and my laptop only.

This isn't as specific to Twitter, but I'll give this other piece of advice because when I give that talk, the piece of advice that I tell people, if you only want to take one thing away from the talk it should be this, don't have your phone in your room overnight when you're sleeping. It's not just for kids, it's for everybody. If at all possible get the devices out of your bedroom. The research on that from sleep labs is so clear, that it's disruptive to sleep. And try not to look at devices in about the hour before bedtime, because so much of it is psychologically stimulating. It's also physiologically stimulating because the blue light shines into your eyes, tricks your brain to thinking it's still daytime, and then you don't produce the melatonin, the sleep hormone, that you need to fall asleep quickly.

Read a book on paper, or on a Kindle Paperwhite, or something that's not as psychologically stimulating and doesn't have the blue light. And you can watch TV because that's not as psychologically stimulating, but wear those cheesy orange glasses that you can buy on Amazon. My whole family does that, I do that. I have a whole stack of them at home and they're like 10 bucks on Amazon, but this is what I always tell people, wear those glasses.

And then I'll leave with this, the thing about the phone in the bedroom overnight that people can't get around is they'll say, "But I have to have my phone in the bedroom overnight because it's my alarm clock." I have some advice for you, buy an alarm clock. You can buy it on your phone and then put your phone away and get a good night's sleep. I know, right? It really is the best way to go.

Dr. Jean T.:

The orange glasses filter out the blue light is what seems to affect melatonin production. I mean, it's not a perfect solution, but if you can watch a traditional TV that's farther away from you, that cuts the blue light right there, as opposed to a tablet or a phone that's right close to your face. And then the orange glasses help filter out the blue light, and help with that.

Josh Good:

Please. Oh, I missed you. I'm so sorry, Kelsey.

Kelsey Dallas:

That's okay. Is there some sort of benefit to TikTok because there's group dances, group activities that you then record?

Dr. Jean T.:

Yeah. Well, there's not a ton of academic research on TikTok because it's so new. But I think if you look at it, yeah, it is more of a community thing, it's more of a group thing. It's dancing, it's fun, it's more active, but I think the issue with it is, it also has that algorithmic design that's addictive.

My oldest daughter is the one who doesn't have the phone, doesn't have any other social media, but she got a TikTok account and she came and told me... And I didn't even know that she had the account, I didn't realize how much time she was spending on it. And she said, "I can't stop watching it." And so she made a decision on her own to delete her account, even though it was fun and probably not as harmful as Instagram in those mental health ways. It was taking up so much of her time that she said, "I'm going into high school now. I can't do it anymore." That was like my proudest parent moment, I have to say, because it wasn't even my idea. It was both my proudest and most embarrassing because I didn't realize how much time she'd been spending on it, but she did finally tell me and then deleted it.

Josh Good:
We wrestled with the swag question and we should have bought alarm clocks, but-

Dr. Jean T.:
Or orange glasses.

Josh Good:
Or orange glasses, or both. Come on back to a future Faith Angle. Thank you so much.