



The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids

By Madeline Levine PhD

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In this ground-breaking book on the children of affluence, a well-known clinical psychologist exposes the epidemic of emotional problems that are disabling America's privileged youth, thanks, in large part, to normalized, intrusive parenting that stunts the crucial development of the self.

In recent years, numerous studies have shown that bright, charming, seemingly confident and socially skilled teenagers from affluent, loving families are experiencing epidemic rates of depression, substance abuse, and anxiety disorders—rates higher than in any other socioeconomic group of American adolescents. Materialism, pressure to achieve, perfectionism, and disconnection are combining to create a perfect storm that is devastating children of privilege and their parents alike.

In this eye-opening, provocative, and essential book, clinical psychologist Madeline Levine explodes one child-rearing myth after another. With empathy and candor, she identifies toxic cultural influences and well-intentioned, but misguided, parenting practices that are detrimental to a child's healthy self-development. Her thoughtful, practical advice provides solutions that will enable parents to help their emotionally troubled "star" child cultivate an authentic sense of self.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A practicing psychologist in Marin County, Calif., Levine counsels troubled teens from affluent families, and finds it paradoxical that wealth—which can open the door to travel and other enriching opportunities—can produce such depressed, anxious, angry and bored teenagers. After comparing notes with colleagues, she concluded that consumerism too often substitutes for the sorts of struggles that produce thoughtful, happy people. If objects satisfy people, then they never get around to working on deeper issues. The teen years are supposed to be a time for character building. Avoiding this hard work with the distraction of consumer toys can produce "vacant," "evacuated" or "disconnected" teens, Levine believes. She is particularly useful when explaining common parenting dilemmas, like the difference between being intrusive and being involved, between laying down rules and encouraging autonomy. Alas, while Levine pitches to the educated moms, since they do much of the actual child-rearing, she may be preaching to the choir. Those who need her most may be too busy shopping to pick up such a dire-looking volume. Still, school guidance counselors should be happy to have this clear, sensitive volume on their bookshelves. (*July*)

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From Scientific American

Wandering among suburban estates, sports clubs and prep schools are overlooked children of a perplexed generation. Their lives overflow with abundance and praise, yet ironically, the mask of apparent health and success may hide a gloomy world of emptiness, anxiety and anger. Strangely, argues Madeline Levine, a clinical psychologist practicing in Marin County, California, the nation's latest group of at-risk kids comes from affluent, well-educated families. Despite advantages, these children experience disproportionately high rates of clinical depression, substance abuse, anxiety, eating disorders and self-destructive (even self-mutilating) behaviors, according to various studies. Based on criteria from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Levine says these children "are exhibiting epidemic rates of emotional problems beginning in junior high school and accelerating throughout adolescence." One may brush off these youngsters as overindulged products of wealthy, narcissistic parents. But Levine says many of these kids are really ill. They suffer from a weak sense of self, often struggling to fill inner emptiness with objects and praise. Too often they know something is wrong and grope desperately for help yet fail to escape a downward spiral. Could it be, Levine wonders, that privilege, high expectations, competitive pressure and parental overinvolvement yield toxic rather than protective effects? Levine explores such issues as social isolation, the fine line between parental underinvolvement and overindulgence, and the perverse role of money and material goods in creating false promises of fulfillment. Yearning for outward approval, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the delusion that wealth causes happiness. In many cases, a rude awakening occurs only after many years of anxiety and depression. Levine's writing is surprisingly reflective and interesting. A constructive therapist, she offers practical guidelines and parenting strategies for those struggling with troubled teens. The advice is useful to any parent of any income level and includes ways to foster healthy autonomy, impulse control and sense of self. Levine emphasizes the importance of discipline, monitoring and limit setting as ways to encourage kids to construct healthy "inner" homes. More important, parents must "stand on their own two feet" before expecting their children to stand on theirs—noting that many parents scold their children for social behaviors that they themselves cannot manage, such as substance abuse and lack of self-discipline or self-assertion. Parents must strive to get their own inner homes in order before they can expect kids to straighten out theirs.

Richard Lipkin

From [Booklist](#)

Recent studies have shown that 22 percent of upper-middle-class adolescent girls (three times the national rate) suffer from clinical depression--a stark illustration of the old saw that money doesn't buy happiness. Psychologist Levine draws on clinical research, hundreds of case studies, and 25 years of treating troubled adolescents from well-to-do families to explore the rise in mental and emotional disorders among privileged youth. Levine offers portraits of adolescents from homes of parental involvement and material advantage in which the children nonetheless suffer from addictions, anxiety and eating disorders, depression, and self-destructive behavior. Levine makes the case for why these young people are as much "at risk" as those from lower economic backgrounds and how the culture of affluence can stifle self-development. She offers advice on effective techniques to reduce pressure from parents to succeed in school and to heighten adolescent autonomy and self-discipline. In this insightful book, Levine eschews the temptation to dismiss problems of privileged teens as overindulgence. *Vanessa Bush*

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