On the Internalizing & Cluster B, Chthonian Crisis of the Current Moment

Algorithmic social media platforms are an incubator for performative histrionics & help fuel a pernicious cancel culture that hijacks the normative capacity to experience fear, anxiety, & guilt.

J.D. Haltigan

Date: Aug 04, 2022

URL: https://www.jdhaltigan.com/p/on-the-internalizing-and-cluster

Chthonian (adj): concerning, belonging to, or inhabiting the underworld. "a chthonic deity"

Setting aside current 'academic' debate regarding the categorical or dimensional nature of common clinical and personality disorders and mental illness symptoms (and the mechanistic causal explanations for their manifestation), it is nonetheless possible to make a strong case that symptoms and signs associated with common clinical and personality disorders spanning internalizing and Cluster B personality disorders are disproportionately reflected in (radical) leftist activism and the political attitudes and beliefs associated with them.

Clinical symptoms of anxiety disorders as predictors of political attitudes: A prospective cohort study

Vilja Helminen[1] , Marko Elovainio[1,2], and Markus Jokela[1]

[1]Department of Psychology and Logopedics, Faculty of Medicine, University of Helsinki, Finland

[2]National Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland

Conservative political ideologies have been suggested to correlate with elevated sensitivity to threat. However, it is unclear whether the associations between threat sensitivity and political attitudes can be observed with clinical measures of mental health. We examined how anxiety disorders predicted attitudes on several political issues. Participants were 7253 individuals from the 1958 British Birth Cohort study. Symptoms of generalised anxiety disorder, phobia and panic were assessed in a clinical interview at age 44, and opinions about political issues were self-reported by the participants 6 years later. Anxiety symptoms were associated with higher concerns about economic inequality, preservation of the environment, distrust in politics and lower work ethic. No associations were observed with racist or authoritarian attitudes, or support for traditional family values. We also assessed how political attitudes at ages 33 and 42 predicted anxiety disorder symptoms at age 44, revealing a possible bidirectional association between concern for economic inequality and anxiety disorder symptoms. These findings do not support an association between conservative political attitudes and elevated threat sensitivity. Rather, elevated anxiety may increase concerns about social inequality and the environment.

Keywords: Political attitudes; Threat; NCDS; Fear; Anxiety.

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/ijop.12796

The politics of depression: Diverging trends in internalizing symptoms among US adolescents by political beliefs

Catherine Gimbrone [*], Lisa M. Bates, Seth J. Prins, Katherine M. Keyes

Department of Epidemiology, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA

ABSTRACT

Adolescent internalizing symptoms (e.g. depressive affect) have increased over the past decade in the US, particularly among girls. The reasons for these increases are unclear. We hypothesize that increasing exposure to politicized events has contributed to these trends in adolescent internalizing symptoms, and that effects may be differential by political beliefs and sociodemographic characteristics. We analyzed nationally-representative data from 2005 to 2018 Monitoring the Future annual cross-sectional samples of 12th-grade students (N = 86,138). We examined self-reported political beliefs, sex, and parental education as predictors of four internalizing symptom scales over time, including depressive affect. From 2005 to 2018, 19.8% of students identified as liberal and 18.1% identified as conservative, with little change over time. Depressive affect (DA) scores increased for all adolescents after 2010, but increases were most pronounced for female liberal adolescents (b for interaction = 0.17, 95% CI: 0.01, 0.32), and scores were highest overall for female liberal adolescents with low parental education (Mean DA 2010: 2.02, SD 0.81/2018: 2.75, SD 0.92). Findings were consistent across multiple internalizing symptoms outcomes. Trends in adolescent internalizing symptoms diverged by political beliefs, sex, and parental education over time, with female liberal adolescents experiencing the largest increases in depressive symptoms, especially in the context of demographic risk factors including parental education. These findings indicate a growing mental health disparity between adolescents who identify with certain political beliefs. It is therefore possible that the ideological lenses through which adolescents view the political climate differentially affect their mental wellbeing.

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666560321000438

Internalizing and affective mental illness symptomatology (e.g., elevated levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms and negative emotionality [NE]) is characteristic of mood and anxiety disorders and is one of the most prevalent psychiatric complaints throughout the lifespan. These mental illness symptoms also often present in conjunction with personality disorder psychopathology, including some elevated Cluster-B (narcissistic, borderline, histrionic) personality disorder symptoms.

Algorithmic scopic social media, especially TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram, where amplification of visual footage can reach viral transmission with remarkable celerity, is an especially efficient social portal or spread vector that selects for this behavioral signature of emotional lability and provocative affect—'performative resistance art'—, which inherently serves to focus the viewer's attention. One might view it as an incubator for personality psychopathology in a similar vein as how Jordan B. Peterson recently spoke about how the contemporary university milieu has contributed to a "fostered narcissism of the students...". It also serves to gate a potentially unbridled cancel culture milieu where individuals are accused of unfounded moral or ethical transgressions and flash mobs emerge to target the accused before any rational examination of the accusations are undertaken. As Vinay Prasad and John Ioannidis have described, this phenomenon has increasingly emerged in academic discourse on Twitter, where

scientists often punitively engage with one another and their academic work.

Below is a compilation of social media video clips and related media coverage that demonstrate with remarkable clarity the miasma of performative narcissism that saturate the current culture. It is instructive to note the interpersonal and affective behavioral similarities in each of these clips. Antagonism, scorn, narcissism, derision, histrionics, & a host of other personality psychopathology symptoms characterized by NE. Although one could certainly point to examples from individuals on the right (Trump's performative <u>grandiose narcissism</u> comes to mind), it is quite reasonable to suggest this particular constellation of behaviors and personality traits—characterized more strongly by a <u>virtuous</u>, <u>vulnerable narcissism</u>—is much more prevalent in those associated with radical progressivist activism; in other words, the contemporary mainstream left where politicians in 'big blue' cities are increasingly "<u>performative actors on behalf of the media.</u>"

A recent example where performative, vulnerable narcissism and theatrics have been weaponized in the service of ideology occurred when senators Alexandria Oscasio-Cortez, and Ilhan Omar (two members of the original 'Squad') pretended to be handcuffed when escorted away from the Supreme Court where they were engaged in abortion rights protests with other House Democrats:

[Tweet: https://twitter.com/FreeBeacon/status/1549471850467676160?s=20&t;=BJfHHavQFXSMOY2h1wvHog]

As Charles C. W. Cooke noted:

[Tweet: https://twitter.com/charlescwcooke/status/1549485628022202374?s=20&t;=BJfHHavQFXSMOY2h1wvHog]

Another recent prototype exemplar: Law professor Khiara M. Bridges in discourse with Senator Josh Hawley. Particularly noteworthy is the antagonism in her replies to Hawley, escalating the emotional tenor of the discourse and attempting to draw Hawley into a combative frame "are you, are you, are you" (note the vocal tone & cadence takes on an escalatory manner).

[Tweet: https://twitter.com/RyanTAnd/status/1546905377098301440]

Remember this example of the students at Arizona State University being asked to leave a multicultural space?

[Tweet: https://twitter.com/CalebJHull/status/1441261643355156488]

Arguably here we see performative narcissism from Ariel Atkins on the looting last summer in Chicago. Entitlement and narcissism likely share some common etiology.

[Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzZLlsxNcpE]

And another from Chicago from last August h/t <u>@John_Kass</u> 'performance art.'

[Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jre3pBUdyDE]

Here's a prototypical 'climate activist' variant:

[Tweet: https://twitter.com/ABC/status/1550952977426415616]

And here is another where a protestor interrupts the French Open semi-final for 10 minutes.

[Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QY-8BMWTbfY]

Continuing with this class of individuals, others have remarked:

[Tweet: https://twitter.com/BuckSexton/status/1552120290775269376?s=20&t;=bZDqnglc1pp Nl5jhXQObPQ]

Concerning the question of the rapid emergence of this striking association between behavior, personality, and political attitudes and beliefs, much has been written. For example, the recent report by Eric Kaufman described in this tweet thread is strikingly consistent with the above mini review of literature and social media discourse.

[Tweet: https://twitter.com/epkaufm/status/1531264186046636032?s=20&t;=_-QRxBvsUYq98 3BSG4v8Uw]

This very interesting niche paper "Tik Tok teens: Turbulent identities for turbulent times" offers some of the most provocative insights I have come across into the contributing role of social media in the emergence of this phenomenon.

I have offered my own view on the matter in a prior piece focusing on one city in particular, Pittsburgh, PA. This piece, penned by Martin Gurri, and recently featured on Wes Yang's Substack Year Zero, illustrates with precision the visual elements depicted above in the context of "the psychopathology of the elite class". Gurri draws out the quasi-religious elements of this psychopathology, which are eerily reminiscent of similar observations Chrisopher Lasch noted decades earlier "The Revolt of the Elites":

much about ideological fanaticism often fall into a complacency of their own, which we see especially in liberal intellectuals. It is as if they alone understood the danger of misplaced universality, the relativity of truth, the need for suspended judgment. They see themselves, these devoutly open-minded intellectuals, as a civilized minority in a sea of fanaticism. Priding themselves on their emancipation from religion, they misunderstand religion as a set of definitive, absolute dogmas resistant to any kind of intelligent appraisal. They miss the discipline against fanaticism in religion itself. The "quest for certainty," as Dewey called it, is nowhere condemned with such relentless passion as in the prophetic tradition common to Judaism and Christianity, which warns again and again against idolatry, the idolatry of the church included. Many intellectuals assume that religion satisfies the need for moral and emotional security—a notion that even a passing knowledge of religion would dispel. There are limits, it seems, even to the openness of the open mind, limits quickly revealed when the conversation turns to religion.

Whatever the causal web of its origins are—perhaps a distinct cluster of behavioral and personality traits selected for by the unique reverberative framework of scopic social media—the crisis of the current cultural moment is qualitatively and quantitatively distinct. Its existence is undeniable. What remains to be seen is whether thought and political leaders emerge to shepherd us in navigating the Chthonian tempest else our nation does not continue to Balkanize and fractionate. In the words of Goldberg and Gurri writing in separate decades:

If questioned values are not merely a few values in a thin slice of one's reality, but a great number encompassing a huge portion of that reality, it is possible that the threat to one's security will be overpowering and immobilizing. This will be particularly damaging if we have now passed a critical point at which uncontrollable, omnipresent change itself has, because of the unavoidable confusion into which it throws the value system's hierarchy of expectations, the nihilistic effect of inculcating in the young hatred for an irrelevant past, terror toward a future of despair, and a narcissistic hedonism that threatens any sense of community.

Each of these institutions possessed a semi-monopoly over the information in its own domain. They were keepers of the stories that explained us to ourselves. They uttered, from above, the authoritative truth.

Shared Meaning

What happens when the mediators lose their legitimacy—when the shared stories that hold us together are depleted of their binding force? That's easy to answer. Look around: we happen. The mirror in which we used to find ourselves faithfully reflected in the world has shattered. The great narratives are fracturing into shards. What passes for authority is devolving to the political war-band and the online mob—that is, to the shock troops of populism, left and right. Deprived of a legitimate authority to interpret events and settle factual disputes, we fly apart from each other— or rather, we flee into our own heads, into a subjectivized existence. We assume ornate and exotic identities, and bear them in the manner of those enormous wigs once worn at Versailles.