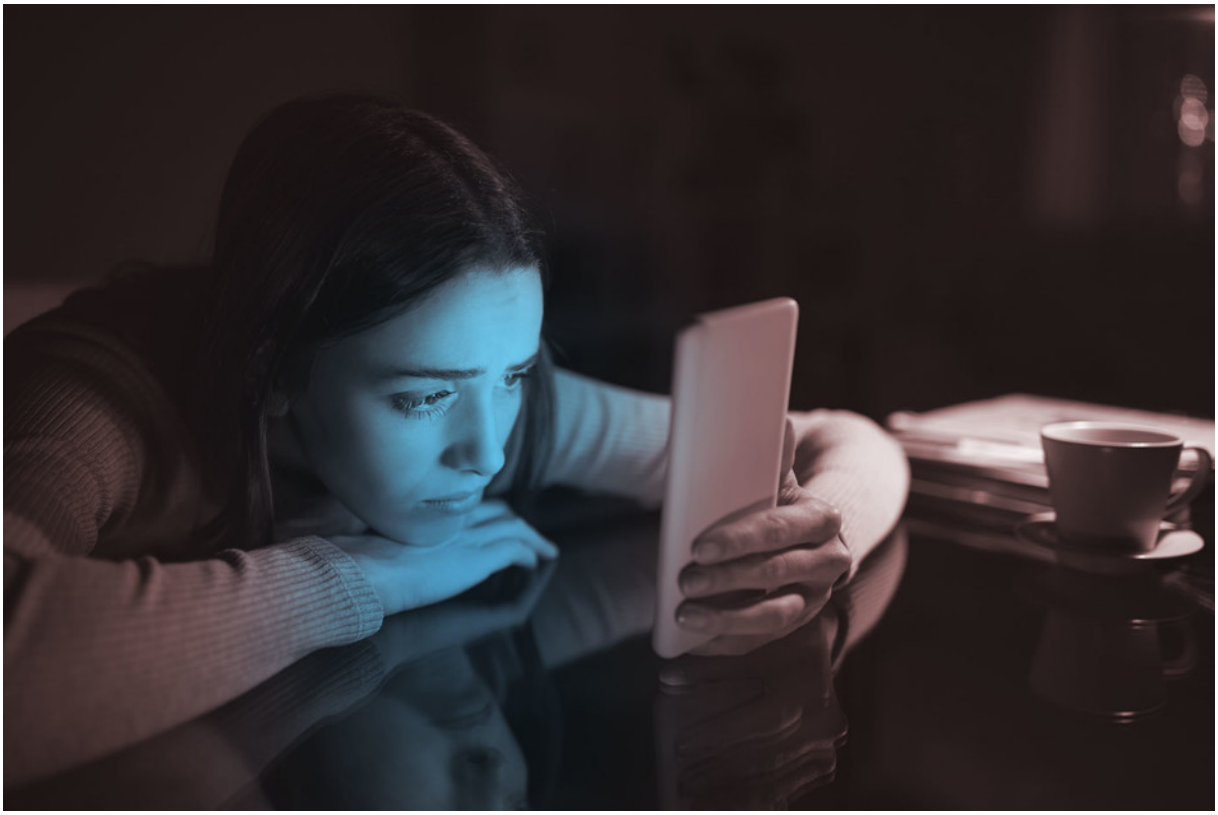
Health & Medicine

Why Depression Rates Are Higher Among Liberals

Columbia researchers look at the politics of despair.

By
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|
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Antonio Guillem

American adults who identify as politically liberal have long reported lower levels of happiness and psychological well-being than conservatives, a trend that mental-health experts suspect is at least partly explained by liberals' tendency to spend more time worrying about stress-inducing topics like racial injustice, income

inequality, gun violence, and climate change.

Now a team of Columbia epidemiologists has found evidence that the same pattern holds for American teenagers. The researchers analyzed surveys collected from more than eighty-six thousand twelfth graders over a thirteen-year period and discovered that while rates of depression have been rising among students of all political persuasions and demographics, they have been increasing most sharply among progressive students — and especially among liberal girls from low-income families.

The authors, who include Columbia professors Katherine M. Keyes ’10PH, Seth J. Prins ’16PH, and Lisa M. Bates, along with graduate student and lead author Catherine Gimbrone, speculate that left-leaning teens may have been deeply affected by Donald Trump’s election as president, the US Supreme Court’s subsequent lurch to the right, rising socioeconomic inequality, and worsening political polarization. “Liberal adolescents may have therefore experienced alienation within a growing conservative political climate such that their mental health suffered in comparison to that of their conservative peers whose hegemonic views were flourishing,” they write.

This article appears in the Spring/Summer 2023 print edition of Columbia Magazine *with the title "The politics of depression."*

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