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SUNDAY REFLECTIONS

Anxiety in teenagers has grown along with tech use

For an artist whose tools are language, the beast that stalked John Green was impossible to express.

Green is a rock star young adult novelist. His book, "The Fault in Our Stars," sold more than 23 million copies and was adapted into a film. But for years, he has suffered from near-crippling anxiety, a condition that sends him into a carousel of obsessive terror and dread.

Green's newest book, "Turtles All the Way Down," which has been released to critical praise, is the end product of months of twisting and turning into his own froth of anxieties. It was, he told The New York Times, a topic that forced its way on him.

The novel's protagonist, 16-year-old Aza Holmes, suffers from crippling anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder. Controlling it seems, as it feels to many who suffer anxiety's relentless grasp, elusive.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million Americans. Increasingly, however, its victims are teenagers.

In the last decade, anxiety rates among teenagers has soared, such that it is now the most common reason college students seek out counseling, reports The New York Times. Since 2009, anxiety has surpassed depression as the top concern among college students, reports the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors, particularly among girls.

In that same period, the number of hospital admissions for suicidal teenagers has doubled. Among college freshmen, those who agreed they "felt overwhelmed by all I had to do" in the previous year jumped from 18 percent in 1985 to 41 percent last year, reports the Higher Education Research Institute at U.C.L.A.

All of this is in spite of the fact teenagers and college students are now physically safer than they have ever been, reports Jean Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University, and author of the new book, "iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy — and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood — and What That Means for the Rest of Us."

Twenge's research finds that "iGen," the crop of young people born between 1995 and 2012, drink less than those before them, are less likely to have sex early or hang out with their peers and drive later. But, she writes in The Atlantic, "It's not an exaggeration to describe iGen as being on the brink of the worst mental health crisis in decades."

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TRACEY O'SHAUGHNESSY



Kassene Taylor of Waterbury works at the Mount Olive Senior Center in Waterbury. Taylor, who trained to work in the culinary field, had been unemployed for two years before finding a job through the state's Maturity Works program.

STEVEN VALENTI REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

Maturity really does work

State-run program helps find jobs for those 55 and older

BY TRACEY O'SHAUGHNESSY
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

"IT'S A FUN WAY TO GIVE BACK TO THE SENIORS. THEY REALLY ENJOY THEMSELVES WHEN THEY COME HERE. IT'S A WAY FOR ME TO GIVE BACK. IT'S GIVEN ME A CHANCE TO EXERCISE WHAT I KNOW HOW TO DO. THEN I DON'T FEEL LIKE I WENT TO SCHOOL FOR NOTHING. IN RETURN, I LEARN TO INTERACT WITH SENIORS AND I ENJOY HELPING THEM. JUST TO SEE A SMILE ON THEIR FACE MAKES ME HAPPY."

KASSENE TAYLOR

Patrick Murphy sees it all the time. Bad luck. Lost chances. A disability. A divorce. And very little income.

Murphy is the coordinator for Waterbury's branch of Maturity Works, a Senior Community Service Employment program run by the state Department of Labor. For the past six months, he has been trying to place low-income people over age 55 in jobs that will help integrate them into the workplace.

The program trains applicants who meet its requirements in positions for employment in non-profits throughout the region — anything from food production in the city's soup kitchen to administrative assistant work in the Department of Labor. Many of those in the program have been unemployed for long periods. Others lack the skills — primarily computer-related — for employment.

And all, Murphy says, have felt dejected, discouraged and downtrodden.

"What I've found is that with a lot of them there is a low level of self-esteem because the system has just beaten them down," said Murphy. "It's hard to find work."

The number of people 65 and older who are employed full or part time is increasing. In 2000, 13 percent of the age group worked. By last May, the

figure jumped to 19 percent, a number that is expected to soar to 32 percent in the next five years, according to Pew Research. As of 2016, nearly half of all unemployed workers over 55 have become part of the "long-term unemployed," meaning they have been searching for work for at least 27 weeks.

To be eligible for the Maturity Works program, financed by a federal grant and administered through The Workplace, applicants must be long-term unemployed state residents, 55 or older and have an annual family income less than 125 percent of the federal poverty income guidelines, which is currently \$15,075 for a single person or \$25,525 for a family of three.

Kassene Taylor, 58, of Waterbury had been one of them. Taylor, who trained to work in the culinary field, had been unemployed for two years. But when he lost his job with Savers in Bristol, he found it difficult to find another.

"There was no work," he said. "It was hard to find. Either you were overqualified or underqualified."

He heard about the Maturity Works program while searching for a job at the Department of Labor. He now helps feed seniors lunch at the Mount Olive Senior Center in Waterbury. He has been training there since 2015.

"I love it," Taylor said. "It's a fun way to give

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Jerry Misiewicz counts bikers and pedestrians as they pass by him along the Three Rivers Heritage Trail near the Hot Metal Bridge in South Oakland. It's just one of a number of volunteer efforts he's undertaken, from helping with tax returns to youth sports coach.

TNS

Volunteering a 'next step' for active seniors

BY MARIA SCIULLO
PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

It was a few minutes before 10 in the morning and a stifling 86 degrees on the Great Allegheny Passage. Jerry Misiewicz propped a folding lawn chair along the weed-filled hillside. It provided some semblance of shade as trucks roared up at nearby ramp.

Dressed in a white golf shirt and gray shorts, Misiewicz, 67, looked trim and ready to golf a round of 18.

Instead, he pulled a clipboard out of a tote bag and began arranging paper. Misiewicz is a "counter." Six times a year, mostly in the warmer months, he and others take two-hour shifts along the trail to register how many, and how often, people run, walk, bike, stroll or exercise their pets.

He's a volunteer. McCandless resident Sandy Stein, 65, retired four years ago after 31 years of teaching in special education programs in the North Allegheny School District. Af-

ter 9/11, she began working with the American Red Cross, first with office work but now in deployment to help victims of disaster.

"The thing that's nice about the Red Cross is there are a lot of opportunities for people in whatever they're willing to do. Maybe they only want to work in an office, maybe just as deployment specialist," Stein said. "Pretty much any skill set you have."

She's a volunteer. As is

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Colored contacts can hurt your eyes

BY TOM AVRIL
THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Want the piercing blue eyes of a “Game of Thrones” White Walker, or perhaps the milky “blind” eyes of Arya Stark? Beware of colored contact lenses that are sold without a prescription because they can cause serious — even permanent — damage to the eyes.

Health officials and physicians say the lenses can lead to a host of ills: infections, scrapes and ulcers. Some varieties can even lead to corneal hypoxia — when the cornea is starved of oxygen, said Anna P. Murchison, director of the Wills Eye emergency department in Philadelphia.

“We worry about this every year,” Murchison said.

And don’t get Murchison started on another risky way to change eye color: using a needle to “tattoo” the whites of the eye. Canadian model Catt Gallinger is among the latest to try that ill-advised stunt, and now she is warning others that she suffered pain and blurry vision as a result.

Squeamish yet?

Murchison and her colleagues want all those would-be ghouls and goblins to know there is a safe way to alter eye color: tinted contact lenses sold with a prescription. That means an eye specialist has measured the curvature of the wearer’s eyes, ensuring that the contacts fit properly. In addition, such lenses are made of safe materials and are approved



There are healthy and safety concerns with non-prescription colored contacts.

by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Still, the nonprescription varieties are easy to find this time of year, both from on-line retailers and at costume stores — even though their sale is illegal in at least one respect.

It is against FDA regulations to sell contacts that have not undergone agency review. This applies both to contacts that correct poor vision and to those designed solely to change eye color.

And even if a given type of lens is FDA approved, a retailer is running afoul of Federal Trade Commission rules by selling them without a prescription, said Alysa S.

Bernstein, an attorney with the agency’s division of advertising practices.

Legality aside, here is why nonprescription contacts can cause vision problems:

Contact lenses that lack FDA approval, generally the cheapest brands, can be made of impermeable materials. That means oxygen cannot reach the cornea, and someone who wears such lenses is literally suffocating the surface of the eye, causing it to become swollen and cloudy, Murchison said. Some cheap varieties also contain harmful substances such as lead, a neurotoxin, and chlorine, which can cause irritation. Others may

be stamped with a design that can irritate the inside of the eyelid, she said.

Contacts that have been reviewed by the FDA, on the other hand, still can cause vision problems if sold without a prescription, meaning that they have not been fitted to the wearer’s eyes. They can be too tight or too loose, leading to rubbing, inflammation, and infection, Murchison said.

Murchison’s advice: Get your eyes measured with a proper exam, and buy a pair that are approved by the FDA.

“Your vision is worth the price of a prescription,” she said.

WORK: Older workers finding unfair job barriers

Continued from 10E

back to the seniors. They really enjoy themselves when they come here. It’s a way for me to give back. It’s given me a chance to exercise what I know how to do. Then I don’t feel like I went to school for nothing. In return, I learn to interact with seniors and I enjoy helping them. Just to see a smile on their face makes me happy.”

Murphy works with the city’s nonprofits to match applicants with specific jobs. Currently, he works with between 40 to 45 residents who have issues ranging from physical or intellectual disabilities to low education or a language barrier. The program pays participants minimum wage while they “train,” or work, at their new positions.

“It’s an amazing opportunity,” said Perry Thompson, who works with the program. “This is a place where the mature worker is able to re-enter the workforce. The way society is right now, if you are 55 or older, it’s hard to get a position out there. No one will ever say they’re discriminating, but they are discriminated against.”

Many of these workers have been stuck in part because employers are seeking specific years of experience, rather than the type of skill set older workers bring, said Beverley M. Riddick, executive director of Ready-to-Work, a private coalition



Kassene Taylor of Waterbury talks with a senior client at the Mount Olive Senior Center in Waterbury.

based in New Jersey.

“This is where the rubber hits the road,” she said. “When (employers) post a job, they say things like ‘three to five years of experience required.’ That automatically filters out a lot of this hidden talent. Employers need to think really hard about the real skills the job requires versus the experience and then post for those skills, not the experience.”

Riddick’s employer-led organization tries to get employers to see the value in hiring the long-term unemployed, under-employed, veterans, people with disabilities and youth.

“If you’re a 52-year-old woman who hasn’t worked in five months or five years, you don’t look like what (employers) are expecting to see,”

she said. “We are trying to encourage employers to change that filtering-out process.”

Tom Long of The Workforce, agreed. “We find that when people reach a certain age, they find certain barriers to full-time employment,” he said.

That takes an obvious financial toll, but also an emotional one, said Thompson.

“Society has beaten them down,” he said. “They begin to feel worthless.”

Many nonprofits see benefits of the effort.

“It’s an excellent, excellent program,” said Barbara Dublin of Greater Waterbury Interfaith Ministry, which runs a soup kitchen and food pantry.

“It helps all of us. It helps the agency and it helps the

individuals who learn new skills and could put them to work in a work setting for someone else in a training period.”

Participants are given a four-year window in which to train to find permanent employment. They work 20 hours a week at the training sites, where they gain on-the-job work experience and the skills needed to find permanent employment.

Dublin said that some of the trainees go on to other jobs.

One of the trainees who is now looking for a job in the restaurant industry, based on her training at the soup kitchens.

“She not only learned the skills of working in a restaurant, she learned one-on-one dealing with people,” Dublin said. “I believe it helps them deal with certain people and situations. It’s serving in a restaurant, stocking shelves.”

Last year, 74 older workers found employment in Connecticut through the program, the state reports.

“It’s not as if we are training them for one thing,” said Long. “They are trained for jobs customized to their skill set.”

Some have gone on to jobs at Stop & Shop, Shop Rite. One got a job as a taxi driver.

“She will say for me that if it weren’t for the program, she wouldn’t be where she is today,” said Dublin. “She is standing on her own.”

SENIORS: Volunteerism may take many forms

Continued from 10E

Bette McDevitt, who spends some evenings in Downtown’s Theater District, ushering patrons before plays. Some of her other days are consumed with work at the Thomas Merton Center, a peace and social justice organization.

Volunteerism takes many forms, and in the case of those in retirement, it can be a fulfilling option in the years ahead.

Misiewicz on this summer day was settled into his spot near the end of the Hot Metal Bridge. He’d spotted a newspaper article a few years back that mentioned volunteers were needed to compile usage numbers and has since also manned spots near the

Rankin Bridge and Perryopolis.

An accountant, he is particularly suited to the work. Misiewicz was a district manager for H&R Block, and even before his retirement, he helped AARP with its free tax services at local libraries.

“One of the most satisfying things about that is helping people get through a process that is not fun,” he said. “People can be all shook up about their taxes. You get them calmed down.”

He also has given his free time to the American Heart Association and as a youth coach in baseball, basketball and softball. Once, on vacation visiting his son, Kevin, in Florida, he helped plant sea grass in Tampa Bay. “We had to put on boots for

stingray protection!” he said.

But on this humid morning, he was making a detailed accounting. The Great Allegheny Passage has boxes at such checkpoints, where infrared sensors also count bodies as they go by. Human numbers compared to the machines’ helps keep the counts honest.

He counted not just people, but what they were doing, and in which direction they were headed: north, south, on foot, biking, walking dogs. there was even a rickshaw cyclist headed toward PNC Park for a daylight Pirates game.

As his professional career wound down, Misiewicz said, “I knew I would need to keep active. I’ve even done (cleanup) work on the Montour Trail, even though I’m

not registered.”

An avid cyclist, he might bring his bike to the GAP sessions and when he’s done, go for a ride. He said people often look at him with puzzlement as he sits there, and sometimes they stop to talk.

A few months back, the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics was a colorful distraction: police on motorcycles, lights flashing and runners with the torch, which goes from Pittsburgh to State College for charity.

Another time — and this was technically not on the trail itself, but nearby — someone was out walking a large lizard with a leash and harness. “You never know what you’re going to discover when you’re out and about,” he said.



A study led by Mayo Clinic researchers has found that proton beam therapy in combination with chemo, prior to surgery, may be a better option for elderly patients with esophageal cancer.

Proton therapy may be better option for esophageal cancer

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

A study led by Mayo Clinic researchers has found that proton beam therapy, in combination with chemotherapy, before surgery, may be a better option than a combination using traditional radiation therapy techniques with chemotherapy when treating elderly patients with esophageal cancer.

Standard X-ray radiation therapy techniques include 3-D conformal radiation and intensity-modulated radiation therapy. Results were presented by Dr. Scott Lester, a radiation oncologist at Mayo Clinic, today at the fourth-annual Particle Therapy Cooperative Group — North America Fourth Annual Conference in Chicago.

“Elderly patients experience more post treatment heart and lung problems, and are at higher risk for death after surgery than

younger patients after receiving a combination of preoperative chemotherapy and radiation therapy,” said Lester. “Our study found that patients treated with proton beam therapy experienced lower rates of post-operative heart and lung problems, such as acute respiratory distress syndrome and death.”

Researchers followed 571 patients treated with traditional radiation therapy and chemotherapy followed by surgery from 2007 to 2013.

Thirty-five percent of patients were age 65 or older at diagnosis and classified as elderly for the study. Forty-three percent of elderly patients received 3-D conformal radiation, 36 percent of patients received intensity-modulated radiation, and 21 percent of patients received proton beam therapy. Researchers analyzed outcomes by the type of radiation treatment and compared outcomes.

REFLECT: Are social media driving kids nuts?

Continued from 10E

Why? If the answer surprises you, that’s the first problem.

Smartphones and social media are driving our kids, quite literally, nuts.

In “iGen,” Twenge traced the surge of teenage anxiety to early 2012, not coincidentally the moment at which most Americans had a smartphone. She found the increase in anxiety paralleled a rise in loneliness — a feeling researchers have already linked to excessive social media use. It’s not just that fewer adults have a single good friend in whom they can confide, fewer kids are spending time “hanging out together.”

“The roller rink, the basketball court, the town pool, the local necking spot,” writes Twenge, “They’ve all been replaced by virtual spaces accessed through apps and the web.”

The relationship between screen time and unhappiness is so strong that it defies any other explanation for this surge in anxiety and depression.

Teens who spend more time online are more unhappy; those who spend less are more happy.

“There is not a single exception,” Twenge writes. She believes time and more research will assert a link between screen time and anxiety that will be undeniable. We will be forced to take action.

An increasing number of school districts across the country now have a Bring Your Own Device policy, a sharp departure from the days when bringing these devices into the classroom was anathema.

The more research we discover that smartphones diminish logical reasoning, abstract thought, creativity, problem solving and “avail-

able cognitive capacity,” all of which have been scientifically demonstrated, the more pressure will be imposed on school districts and parents to forbid teenagers from using smartphones in class.

When you have 13-year-old girls confessing to CNN they would “rather not eat for a week than get my phone taken away,” and that, when their phones are taken away, “I literally feel like I’m going to die,” you have a problem.

You also have a problem when you have parents buying into the “must have” technology of the moment, so anxious about their children’s whereabouts they outfit them with devices before they have their first molars.

We are not going to get rid of smartphones, just as we are not going to eliminate Google as a replacement for (gasp!) the Encyclopedia Britannica and the Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature.

So giving out mobile devices to teens in the face of accumulating data attesting to the emotional and intellectual damage is beginning to seem like pedagogical malpractice, to say nothing of parental negligence.

“The worst thing a parent can do is hand over a smartphone and hope for the best,” Dr. Delaney Ruston, the director of “Screenagers” and a physician, told the Times. “But parents often feel like trying to set limits is pointless, that the cat is out of the bag, tech is everywhere. I hear all kinds of excuses. But kids’ brains aren’t wired to self-regulate. They can’t do it without you, and they shouldn’t have to.”

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