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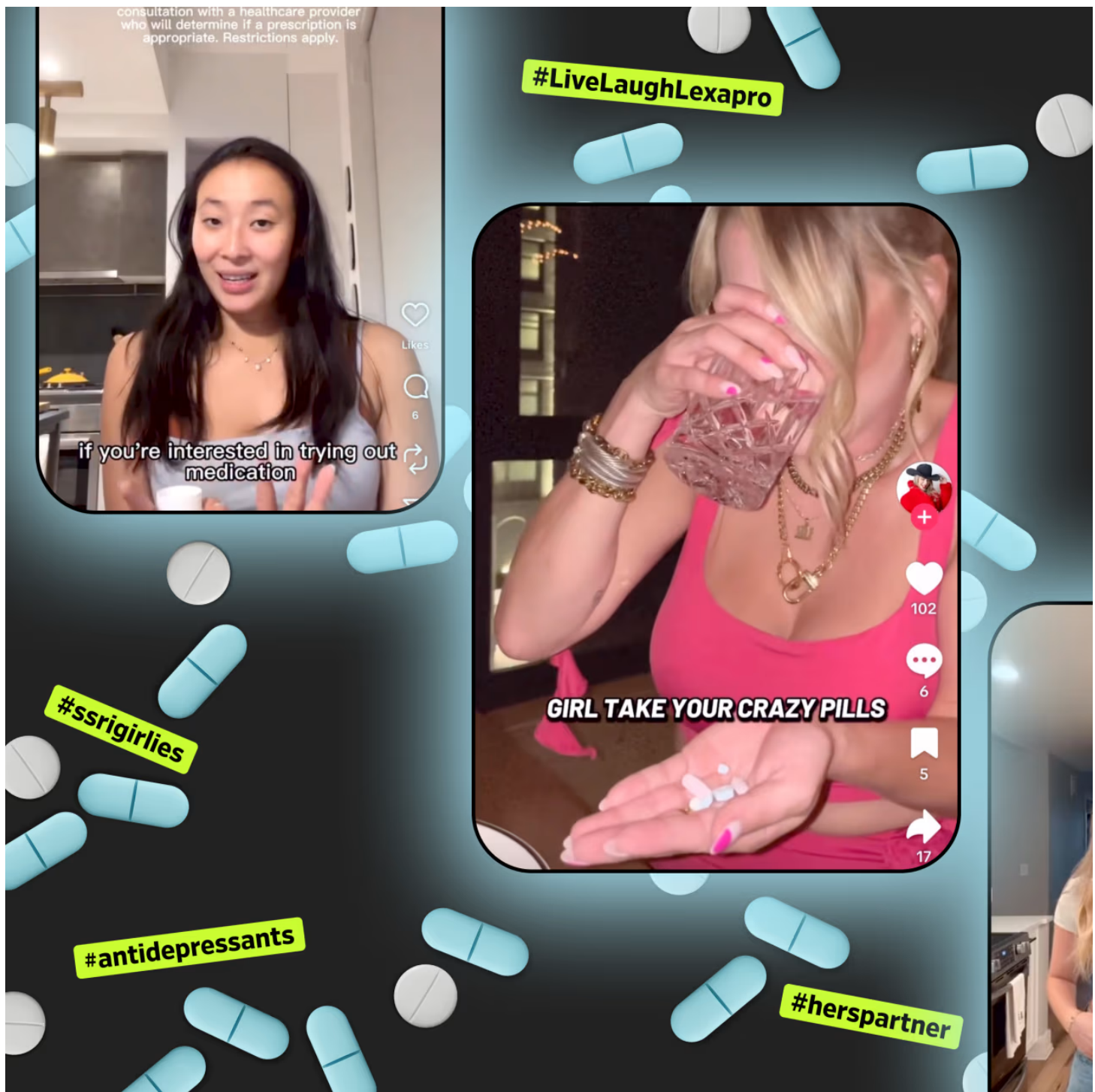
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By [Betsy McKay](#), [Shalini Ramachandran](#)and [John West](#)| Design by [Audrey Valbuena](#)

Oct. 18, 2025 9:00 pm ET



Corinne Byerley, a stay-at-home mom, recalled days when she felt lonely, overwhelmed and, at times, paralyzed with anxiety and self-doubt.

Byerley, who had neither health insurance nor money for psychotherapy, said she was intrigued hearing a former MTV star talk up Lexapro on a podcast in 2023. She searched for the drug on TikTok, her go-to information source, and found #lexaprotok and similar niche online communities, where women in their 20s and 30s praised the benefits of antidepressants.

She posted a video asking for help, and someone recommended Hers, a telehealth company. Byerley answered a questionnaire, and an online nurse practitioner prescribed a generic version of Lexapro. A bottle arrived days later.

Byerley, of Canton, Texas, posted TikTok videos of herself running to the mailbox for a pill package and taking a dose, using such hashtags as **#lexaprobaddies** and **#gethelpmama**. In the months that followed, she gushed over the pills to her thousands of followers.

For a time, Byerley belonged to a social-media movement that has given antidepressants a makeover—from a stigmatized medicine to a healthy lifestyle accessory for enlightened and empowered young women.

Millennial and GenZ influencers, some paid by telehealth companies, evangelize antidepressants on TikTok and Instagram using such hashtags as **#liveloughlexapro**, **#lexaprogirly**, **#lexaho** and **#zoloftgang**, recasting the medications as pop-culture touchstones.

On TikTok, **#antidepressants** has surpassed 1.3 billion views. Views for **#lexapro** have more than tripled since 2022, surpassing 500 million, according to an analysis of data from analytics firm Exolyt by The Wall Street Journal. User shares per video tagged **#ssri** also nearly quadrupled from 2022 to 2025.

Elena Davies, a 35-year-old influencer, made this video in 2023 and posted it in May. She has weaned herself off meds over the past couple of years.

Kelsey Darragh launched a line of Lexapro themed T-shirts this summer. "I want people to give themselves permission to embrace this part of themselves that they have felt so shameful and secretive about before," said Darragh, who has been back on Lexapro since 2022.

Byerley, 34, touted benefits of the medicine, but later felt emotionally numb, had brain fog and a loss of libido, she said. Byerley held off telling followers for months, reluctant to acknowledge her faded sex life and embarrassed about gaining weight.

The nurse practitioner who prescribed the medication had told Byerley initially that "any side effects are generally mild and usually subside quickly."

At first, Byerley made light of some of the side effects, telling TikTok followers that, "overall, I feel like I'm doing really well."

Privately, she sought help for her sexual dysfunction from a psychiatrist, who prescribed two other medications. Byerley abruptly quit them all when nothing helped.

Byerley only recently revealed her withdrawal symptoms, including weeks of headaches, to her nearly 11,000 followers. The pills helped initially, Byerley told the Journal, but the side effects "blew the whole thing up."

Antidepressant use in the U.S. grew during the pandemic, especially among young women in their 20s and early 30s, according to studies and a Journal analysis of 2023 federal data.

Social-media chatter about the medications went viral around the same time.

On TikTok, views per video with any one of the top four antidepressant-related hashtags all grew sharply from 2022 to 2025, according to a Journal analysis of Exolyt data. Likes, shares, and comments per video also rose. Positive posts with each of the four top hashtags on TikTok outnumber negative ones by almost two to one, Exolyt data show.

Many people have been helped by antidepressants, the most common of which are so-called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs, including sertraline, also known as Zoloft, and escitalopram—brand name Lexapro. They have been on the market so long that grandparents, parents and children in the same family now take them.

Yet the rosy picture painted by cheerleading TikTok and Instagram influencers glosses over potential adverse effects. Some suffered side effects that diminished rather than enriched their lives but kept quiet about it on social media.

Antidepressants are portrayed by influencers and in online ads as lifestyle medications, said Dr. Josef Witt-Doerring, a psychiatrist and former FDA official who runs an online clinic to help patients taper off psychiatric medications and

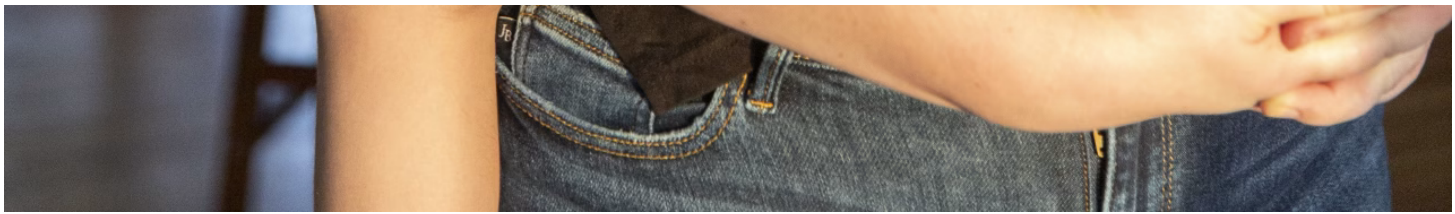
minimize withdrawal symptoms. "People know their favorite celebrity who's taking them."

Yet mental health, he said, is about more than taking a pill.

"The side effects of it blew the whole thing up."

Corinne Byerley





LAURA BUCKMAN FOR WSJ

'KEEPS ME SANE'

Influencer Alix Earle, who has 7.7 million followers on TikTok, disclosed in a December 2022 video that she has been on Lexapro for anxiety since high school.

In the video, which got 6.1 million views, the 24-year-old shook a prescription bottle of pills and urged watchers to talk to a therapist if they have similar symptoms.

Earle has since posted more videos about Lexapro and anxiety, inspiring some viewers.

Learning that Earle “is a lexapro girly too just proves the baddest bitches have crippling anxiety,” one posted in January.

A representative for Earle said she wasn’t available for comment.

Another 24-year-old woman in the U.K. told the Journal she had given up on antidepressants after trying them twice and feeling nothing but emotional numbness and sexual dysfunction. She decided to try a third time after watching Earle talk about the pills in a way that made them seem no more risky than prescription glasses, she said. The medication again delivered no relief, the woman said, but instead set off cognitive problems and emotional numbness that continue more than a year later.

Only 15% of people with major depression experienced a substantial benefit from taking antidepressants beyond the placebo effect of pills that look like real medication, a 2022 [study](#) found. The findings were based on participants in 232 antidepressant randomized, placebo-controlled clinical trials submitted by drug developers to the Food and Drug Administration from 1979 to 2016.

Most people who take antidepressants feel better only because they are taking a pill, said Dr. Marc Stone, a former FDA official and the study’s lead author. Large improvements, however, are much more likely from the drug than a placebo, he said. Scientists don’t yet understand who will benefit from the drug.

The potential benefit of antidepressants has to be weighed against such risks as sexual dysfunction and withdrawal effects, including anxiety and restlessness, Stone said. “My biggest concern is having the discipline to say, ‘Let’s stop the drug if you’re not having a major improvement,’” he said.

The ease of obtaining antidepressants online—and the sometimes limited follow-up by telehealth providers—mean patients might take the drugs longer than they need to, some psychiatrists say. The median length of antidepressant treatment in the U.S. is [five years](#), one study found, despite limited evidence about the effectiveness of such long-term use.

A recent [study](#) found that nearly two-thirds of patients on antidepressants for more than two years had moderate or severe withdrawal symptoms.

Mackenzie Tidwell, 24, describes herself as a proud Zoloft consumer on TikTok. She posts videos sharing about her anxiety and medication with more than 5,700 followers while dancing, putting on makeup and sipping Starbucks.

The Murfreesboro, Tenn., resident, a case manager for foster children, started taking Zoloft in April and said she feels better. Tidwell had struggled with anxiety, depression and disturbing thoughts—for instance, that someone had

poisoned her water bottle.

Seeing others talk about mental health and medication on TikTok “gave me the push I was needing” to seek help, Tidwell said in an interview.

“It makes me feel less alone,” she said.

In July, Tidwell posted a video titled “Zoloft chit chat” and said her side effects had been mild—tiredness and nausea for a few days when she started and when she upped her dose.

“If you’re seeing, like, crazy horror stories online don’t assume that that’s going to happen to you,” she said. “I’ve had a great experience so far. Don’t let social media scare you.”

“The only regret I have about Zoloft is not starting it sooner.”

Mackenzie Tidwell





STACY KRANITZ FOR WSJ

NO SHAME

Telehealth companies, including Hims & Hers Health, have tapped into the burst of online enthusiasm and made it easier than ever for patients to try antidepressants.

Some influencers who speak highly of their antidepressants are paid sponsorship fees by some of the same companies they recommend to followers. The financial ties are typically disclosed with such hashtags as **#herspartner**, along with **#ad** or **#sponsored**.

Hims & Hers has plowed more than \$521 million into digital marketing since 2021, with Hers—the business unit aimed at women—spending a significant chunk on Instagram, TikTok and Facebook, according to estimates from MediaRadar, an ad-tracking firm.

Hers advertises “Depression Meds from Your Sofa” for women and offers a “Balance Blend Rx,” which mixes an antidepressant with supplements for stress and better sleep.

Hims & Hers said it serves patients with mild-to-moderate depression or anxiety. Medical guidelines in the U.S. generally recommend psychotherapy, medication or a combination to treat mild or moderate depression.

The company ran an influencer campaign in 2022 and 2023 that targeted young women with a simple message: *Don't be ashamed to take medications for depression and anxiety*. Hims & Hers paid between \$3,000 and \$10,000 to influencers for making Instagram and TikTok posts, a person familiar with the deals said.

“We're proud that these efforts have helped people connect with qualified clinicians and get the care they need,” a Hims & Hers spokesperson said.

The company said its platform's medical providers, who include nurse practitioners and doctors, prescribe medication only when necessary. The providers also are trained to help patients taper off and stop medications, the company said, and the platform allows for unlimited messaging between patients and their care team.

Nadya Okamoto was one of the influencers paid by the company, including for an Instagram video she posted in December 2022.

At the time, Okamoto had, in fact, been trying to reduce her Zoloft dosage with the help of physicians unconnected to Hers.

The medication had numbed her sex drive and caused her to sweat profusely in her sleep, Okamoto said. On a podcast a few months after her paid posts for Hers, she skewered the medical profession for pushing antidepressants.

Psychiatrists would ask if she had been feeling sad or anxious, Okamoto said, and almost automatically leaned toward increasing her dose. They made her feel as if she were “expected to be numb and emotionless,” she said, rather than acknowledging that sadness is sometimes just part of being human.

“It feels like I'm just putting on a lot of Band-Aids,” she said in the podcast, instead of “pushing myself to just really address the problem at the root cause.”

Okamoto, 27, said she worked with Hers because the medication was initially life-changing. She is getting married next year, she said, and eventually wants to quit antidepressants because she doesn't want to take them while pregnant. Okamoto credited exercise, yoga and other therapies such as acupuncture for helping while she reduces her dose.

In 2019, Ariella Sharf revealed to her Instagram followers that she had been taking antidepressants to cope with anxiety and depression. Without Zoloft, “I struggle silently,” posted Sharf, who has been taking antidepressants since college.

The 32-year-old now has a different message for her 6,500 followers: The pills she credits with saving her life also “nearly broke me,” Sharf said.

Zoloft made her emotionally numb, took away her appetite and left her sweaty and sleepy, she said in an interview. Her doctors never discussed taking her off the medication. “It was just, like, ‘You need this like a diabetic needs insulin,’” she said.

Sharf decided last year to taper off Zoloft. In recent months, she described on Instagram her body shakes, dizziness, “nausea creeping up my throat,” and “eyes and lips drier than the Sahara desert.”

“Emotionally, mentally, and physically excruciating in ways that make no sense,” she wrote at the end of July.

“It’s really beautiful to see people talking about how hard they are to come off of,” she told the Journal. “A lot of doctors don’t believe it can be as bad as it can be.”

She hears from followers suffering similar pains. “They’re so glad they found somebody talking about it,” she said. “They feel less alone.”

Write to Betsy McKay at betsy.mckay@wsj.com, Shalini Ramachandran at Shalini.Ramachandran@wsj.com and John West at john.west@wsj.com

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●●● 1 Person typing

- EM

Ernest Montague
2 minutes ago

Wow. WSJ appears to be pandering not only SSRI's, but "influencers" who use them.

Reply ·  1 · Share
- AR

Auritte Ross
2 minutes ago

'Girl, Get off Your Crazy Pills and go to a yoga class!'

Reply ·  1 · Share
- LF

L Fin
2 minutes ago

Perhaps it's time for Congress to pass some new legislation that no one, except the drug manufacturer can produce any type of videos, either pro or con, about how the drugs made them feel, made them better, made them worse, especially when the video 'influencer' encourages others to either take the drugs because they are so great, or discourages others to not take the drugs because of whatever reason they want to state.

It's weird to see these people have credence -- at all. But it's time for laws to be enacted. I'm surprised the actual drug manufacturers are raising holy hell about this aspect of social media too..

Reply ·  · Share

PV **Peter Vogt**

3 minutes ago

My Mom raised 7 kids,
My Aunts 7-14 big families. They never needed this B.S. But then they dealt with the Grwst Depression,
WWII, death of loved ones in the war, Korean War, the 60's etc.
None of them seemed nuts like so many of these special Tik Tok women do. Gimme a break. Grow up and understand life isn't easy. Keep your legs close if your kids stress you out.

Reply ·  1 · Share

DS **David Stone**

5 minutes ago

Chicks, man.

Reply ·  · Share

JY **Jason Y**

6 minutes ago

Sad things about women these days is most are conformist NPCs

Reply ·  · Share

GM **Gino Marchetti**

9 minutes ago

"And though she's not really ill, there's a little yellow pill. She goes running for the shelter of her mother's little helper." Jagger/Richards.

Reply ·  3 · Share

CA **C abely**

9 minutes ago

If I understand it they have a 15% of working. How is it possible for a trained medical person to prescribe these..."at first do no harm" hims and hers should be shut down

Reply ·  2 · Share

LF **L Fin**

10 minutes ago

Excuse me. While I like the 'crazy pills' slang, mental health issues are no joke. Young women, you're not young and gorgeous forever. Use your brains and stop following the so-called "influencers" who ought to have zero influence on YOU or the rest of the world for crying out loud.

Reply ·  1 · Share**MC** **Michael C**

13 minutes ago

There are some seriously messed-up dudes out there. Quite frankly, dangerous and in some cases, outright disgusting.

That all being said....I am utterly blown away by the sheer volume of women with mental illness, delusion disorders, identity crises, and varying degrees of narcissism.

You read this comment and know I am right, just no one dares to say it.

Reply ·  1 · Share**VG** **Victoria Geibel**

6 minutes ago

-Ah, I see you edited - and now have moved- your comment as I was typing my response.

Maybe you figured out that saying 70% of women are "completely out of line" (. As you said in your original comment) says more about you than the women you malign.

*(Edited)*Reply ·  · Share

●●● 1 replying

PT **P THARP**

15 minutes ago

If you're dancing and singing on TikTok about taking an anti-depressant, you have issues it can't help.

Reply ·  2 · Share**TB** **Thomas Banacek**

16 minutes ago

Maybe getting off TikTok would reduce the crazy symptoms.

Reply ·  4 · Share**NZ** **Nicole Zoquier**

19 minutes ago

All of this is concerning and awful. Social media influencers pushing big pharma like it's cool? How American 🤪 Ignoring social media, influencers, and commentary is the best thing that you can ever do.

Reply ·  5 · Share**PP** **Phil P**

21 minutes ago

But how can this be? Feminism abounds! These ladies can't possibly be unhappy, having escaped oppressive societal expectations, marriage and child-rearing. They're blessedly able now to date men who often don't expect *any* commitment, to work every day (with several weeks off per year!), and to compete with other women over superficialities on social media rather than slaving over some helpless offspring.

This journalist obviously seems to have made some fundamental mistake. Check again to see if they're actually just really happy?

(Edited)

Reply ·  2 · Share

AR

Alan Rose

21 minutes ago

Two generations who demand "organic" everything and shun alcohol sure seem to like modern chemistry to cope with their ridiculous neuroses.
I weep for the future of civilization.

Reply ·  4 · Share

AA

Alex Agorio

22 minutes ago

"Corinne Byerley, a stay-at-home mom, recalled days when she felt lonely, overwhelmed and, at times, paralyzed with anxiety and self-doubt." These are things all human beings experience in their lives. The vast majority of these women probably have no problems at all, they just think they do because they listened to, to put in nicely, crazy people on the internet.

Reply ·  3 · Share

TI

Theodore Iacobuzio

15 minutes ago

Ted's wife - Feeling lonely, overwhelmed, anxiety and self doubt are all normal emotions with your first newborn baby. It's a huge change and no one is prepared. Everything is a crisis now.

Reply ·  1 · Share

MM

Matt Moss

23 minutes ago

Was this article intentionally published like an adolescent wrote it, without an editor? I'm fine with all the social media-esque design elements, but how about telling us the point before we are 10,000 words in?

Reply ·  3 · Share

HA

H Anderson

23 minutes ago

More evidence that social media is far more toxic than we'd all like. No problem, Sam Altman will soon offer an AI companion with a monthly subscription.

Reply ·  4 · Share

JS

JAMES STUART

27 minutes ago

It's been going on since way before there was an internet or cell phones. Remember the Rolling Stones tune lyrics "she goes running to the shelter of her mother's little helper", so doctor please some more of these "or something like that. I'm thinking in the 70's.

Reply ·  1 · Share

MD Mike D

29 minutes ago

I'm a bit concerned the sheer number of people on SSRIs or other "medications". I see people driving more erratic everyday, more distracted more self absorbed. No idea what the answer is but I hope we can get people of the meds and maybe just slow down a bit across the board.

Reply ·  1 · Share

AP Anil P

30 minutes ago

If mental health is a serious concern, why do not we have class in high school that helps children on how to handle it. Along with basic finance and the power of compounding. (Take a student loan and then over time it balloons)

Reply ·  1 · Share

AP Anil P

32 minutes ago

It is normal to feel low. I go thru that often (I work at a startup and that has massive lows + personal stuff etc.), the thing I found that was always helpful was to force myself to go on a hike, or even a walk in the sun!

Sometimes, I wonder if we should have a buddy system where two parties can motivate each other.

Reply ·  · Share



JR Katz

36 minutes ago

Social Media is the bane of society.

Reply ·  12 · Share

VG Victoria Geibel

10 minutes ago

Some demographics about TikTok:

- As of early 2025, TikTok had over 1.58 BILLION monthly active users worldwide.
- Over 70% of users are under 34.
- Globally, there is a slight majority of male users, though this varies by region.
- TikTok users spend an average of 95 minutes per day on the app.

Some demographics about Instagram:

- Instagram has 2 BILLION monthly users.
- 62.3% of users are between 18 and 34 years old.
- The gender split is nearly even, with 50.6% male and 49.4% female users globally.
- The daily average use of Instagram is between 33 and 42 minutes.

What we are witnessing is the rise of an entire generation whose entire world view will be shaped by the lies, exaggerations and misinformation prevalent on social media.

•
Reply · 1 · Share

AB

AA Byron

37 minutes ago

It does seem the easier a life some people have, the more stressed (about nothing) they are. Try coming of age with a military draft, but without any birth control (or any money) to understand real "stress".

Hard as this is to imagine, there are women who took SSRIs while pregnant and their babies were born with these drugs in their tiny bodies, which they have to detox from.

What does this do to the formation of their bodies and brains...why don't their mothers and fathers care?

There is evidence linking "school shooters" to young people who were put on SSRIs as toddlers, turning them into zombies....why don't their mothers and fathers care?

Reply · 4 · Share



This message was deleted.

VG

Victoria Geibel

32 minutes ago

-Ah, I see you edited your comment as I was typing my response.

Maybe you figured out that saying 70% of women are "completely out of line" (. As you said in your original comment) says more about you than the women you malign.

Reply · 3 · Share

TC

Tobias Carling

42 minutes ago

My comment was rejected because I suggested young people take some advice from Mr. C K1rk.

Hmm. Did not know WSJ had become Pravda... Nonetheless, Go the church, Read the bible. Get some sun. Touch grass. Work out. Get married. Have kids. Live for other people, and resist the temptation to be self-focused and selfish...

(Edited)

Reply · 12 · Share

RM

R Mai

47 minutes ago

What we see here is a portrait of a generation of women who, in the absence of durable meaning, belonging, or shared purpose, are reaching for little orange bottles like modern-day talismans against an ache they can't quite name. Reminds me of a G.K. Chesterton quote:

"Meaningless does not come from being weary of pain. Meaningless comes from being weary of pleasure."

Pills can dull an edge, but they don't give you a reason to wake up in the morning.

Reply ·  6 · Share

CE **Carlton Ellis**

50 minutes ago

There are some demographic sectors of society. that are really sick.

Reply ·  4 · Share

AM **Al Min**

50 minutes ago

Covid lockdowns is a gift that keeps on giving.

Reply ·  6 · Share

SC **Steve C**

52 minutes ago

I wish happiness and functional lives to all ladies who are taking antidepressants

Please take good care of yourselves and your loves ones

Reply ·  1 · Share

MB **Michael Baldridge**

55 minutes ago

Valley of the Dolls 2025

Reply ·  4 · Share

CS **Christina Schultz**

59 minutes ago

The logical thing to do is stop using social media since trying to compare/compete with the people they see on Tiktok etc seems to be what is depressing these sad/poor people.

(C's Improved AI Hubby_

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