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Another Reason Young Americans Don't Revolt Against Being Screwed



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[“8 Reasons Young Americans Don't Fight Back: How the US Crushed Youth Resistance”](#)

was originally published in 2011, then republished on several Internet sites, and has become one of my most viewed articles. The eight reasons include: student-loan debt; various pacifying effects of standard schooling; the psychopathologizing and medicating of noncompliance; surveillance; television; and fundamentalist religion and fundamentalist consumerism. Over the last seven years, many young people have told me that they

appreciate that article, but they have urged me to detail a hugely important pacifying source which I had not included.

First, to be clear, not all young people are completely broken. The general state of acquiescence by young people was recently interrupted by their short-lived burst of dissent in the form of large rallies for gun control, in reaction to fears of being murdered in their classrooms. But that was an exception to the general rule of resignation to eating shit.

A longer period of dissent occurred during Occupy, in which many young people protested against their financial subjugation by the 1%. However, one lesson that young people learned from Occupy is that their rulers only pay lip service to democracy—and so mere dissent has little impact. Young people today are correct to recognize the impotence of mere dissent if it is unaccompanied by a withdrawal of cooperation with the ruling class's capacity to turn a profit. But because young people have been broken in so many ways, decreasing numbers of them have the individual strength, class consciousness, and group cohesiveness that is required to move beyond dissent to the kind of constructive disobedience (for example, a labor strike) that can create greater justice for them.

It's not that young people in the United States are ignorant of the reality that they are being financially screwed; they know they have been screwed, they expect to be screwed even worse, and most of them passively accept this reality.

Young people are not ignorant of their increasingly crippling student-loan debt. At [last look](#), 70% of college students graduate with significant debt; the average student-loan debt at \$37,172, and the average monthly payment at \$393 (and this doesn't include their credit card debt). Add this to the reality that many young people with student-loan debt never even graduate college; and even among those who do graduate, many of them find only low-paying jobs.

The majority of young people feel so beaten down that they have also passively accepted that they will get screwed out of Social Security benefits. A [2015 Gallup poll](#) asked "Do you think the Social Security system will be able to pay you a benefit when you retire?" Among those 18 to 29 years of age, 64% said no. Yet, most are resigned to having money deducted from their paychecks for benefits that they believe they will never receive.

Since my 2011 article was published, many millennials have informed me that they are being broken by something that I hadn't originally included: the Internet, which many of them tell me is the most important aspect of their lives. From these young people, I have

learned how the Internet creates fears, lowers self-esteem, and divides them—all of which weakens their capacity to resist injustices.

Fear is a great way to break people, and the Internet—similar to other areas that I had previously detailed—creates fear. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Snapchat, and other so-called “social media” create the fear of permanent shame and shunning. Millennials repeatedly see how a single error in judgment on social media will not be forgotten and can haunt forever—and destroy lives. While many young students voice concern about a shooting in their school, my experience is that they are more viscerally terrified of something being posted on social media by them or about them that can damage their attractiveness to their peers or to future employers. For young people, denial over their life being ruined on social media is impossible—most never unplug from it.

The Internet heightens a fear-based consciousness. People have different private fears and, as George Orwell detailed, their greatest fears can be exploited to break them. For many young people, their greatest fear is being “doxxed”—having private information about them published on the Internet so as to hurt them. For other young people, their greatest fear is “FoMo”—the fear of missing out—which is intensified on social media where they are constantly bombarded with images of others doing “cool” stuff. One young woman recently told me, “You don’t know how crazy we are. I saw a party on Instagram that looked really cool, and I had FoMo over it, even though I know the guy who posted it always makes parties look cooler than they really are.”

Many young people tell me that the constant barrage of their peers’ self-promotions on social media makes them feel inferior; and low self-esteem—like fear—debilitates the strength to resist. One young man recently explained to me that millennials are always aware of their “digital selves” which can be measured in metrics such as “likes”; and that comparing themselves to others routinely results in low self-esteem. Of course, some young people do attempt rebellion, but effective rebellion, they tell me, requires completely extricating from social media, which would be an extremely radical action.

Not only does the Internet create fear and low self-esteem but also divides, which of course allows the 1% to more easily conquer the 99%. The Gilded Age robber barron Jay Gould reportedly bragged, “I can hire one half of the working class to kill the other half.” Millennials have educated me on the various divides among the 99% that have been created and perpetuated on the Internet.

Every millennial young man tells me about the Internet war between “social justice warriors” and “red pillers.” Young people who care about justice for historically oppressed

groups (such as women, people of color, and LGBT folks) are mocked as social justice warriors by those who call themselves red pillers who feel that, today, white males are the oppressed group. In an Internet world absent of face-to-face contact, there is only mutual venom. Absent is a mutual grasping that each side is in the 99%, that each side cares about injustice, and that the financial hell for all of them has been created by the 1%—not by each other.

Screen addiction subverts the in-person contact necessary for face-to-face dialogue and solidarity, and the Internet is even more addictive than television, as young people are virtually never away from their smart phones, laptops, or other screens. Walk into any coffee shop, and you'll often see many young people in close proximity with one another but locked into their own screens and not looking at each other.

Several of my millennial young male informants tell me that they are afraid to risk face-to-face contact, afraid to be seen as violating a woman's privacy, afraid to be viewed as a creep. I joked with one young guy, "Are you afraid that if you walk over to some pretty young woman in a coffee shop and tell her that you like her shoes, then you'll be accused of 'rape-staring' and have your life ruined on the Internet, and end up being falsely labeled all over the Internet as a sex offender?" The young man laughed and said, "I know that you are exaggerating, but that's the kind of shit that many of us millennial guys think about, as we have become pathetic."

Having young men and young women in the 99% being afraid of one another may be even more of a coup for the 1% than their historical successes at getting ethnic and racial groups to hate one another. With this fear and hate among the 99%, it is impossible to have the solidarity and strength necessary to effectively revolt in an organized way against the 1%.

The Internet technology need not necessarily be a pacifying force as, for example, the Internet was effectively utilized during the Arab spring to foment rebellion and organize resistance. Similarly, some of the other pacifying forces that I originally detailed need not be pacifying. Teachers could inspire resistance against illegitimate authorities rather than indoctrinate compliance to any and all authorities. And my fellow mental health professionals could embrace [liberation psychology](#) rather than pathologize and medicate rebellion.

My experience is that young people, in general, are becoming increasingly pained and weakened by multiple oppressive forces, and older people who give a damn about them can help. The 1% will always attempt to seize powerful technologies and institutions to

pacify all of us—especially young people. To manage these technologies and institutions, the 1% needs technocrats, administrators, and guards; thus, what would help is what Howard Zinn called a “[revolt of the guards](#).” However, if technicians, teachers, mental health professionals, and other guards never even admit to ourselves our societal role—as guards who maintain the status quo—then we guards will never consider arevolt. Many older people are guards, and they can choose to revolt and help young people gain the strength necessary to resist injustices.