



The Price of Privilege

By Madeline Levine, PhD
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Introduction

Numerous studies show that privileged adolescents are experiencing epidemic rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse—at rates higher than those of any other socioeconomic group of young people. The elements of a perfect storm—materialism, pressure to achieve, perfectionism, disconnection—are combining to create a crisis in America's affluent teenagers.

Madeline Levine has practiced as a psychologist for twenty-five years. Her adolescent patients are bright, socially skilled, and loved by their parents. But behind a veneer of achievement and charm, many of these advantaged teens suffer from severe emotional problems.

In this controversial look at privileged families, Levine offers thoughtful, practical advice as she explodes one child-rearing myth after another. With empathy and candor, she identifies parenting practices that are toxic to healthy self-development and that have contributed to rampant levels of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse in the most unlikely place—the affluent family.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you characterize the "culture of affluence" that Madeline Levine identifies in *The Price of Privilege*, and to what extent do you recognize it in your community?
2. What role does materialism play in parenting and childrearing in today's society, and how is it connected to some of the emotional problems faced by many affluent teens and their parents?
3. Why do affluent teens experiencing significant stress tend to bond with other teens with poor values, and how might parents intervene?
4. Madeline Levine writes: "A sense of lovability is the core of all healthy self-development." To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?
5. How does the overinvolvement of parents during their children's early years impact the ability of their offspring later in life to enjoy emotional intimacy with romantic partners?
6. How do you distinguish among the three kinds of parenting Levine identifies—the authoritarian parent, the permissive parent, and the authoritative parent—and with which style do you most strongly identify, as either child or parent?
7. What role does warmth play in the emotional development of children, and how might a parent cultivate this quality in an ongoing relationship with an adolescent?
8. How do you make sense of Levine's caveat that parental praise may actually discourage or detract from a child's learning?
9. How does a child's early attachment to his or her mother relate to his emotional development?
10. What role does social isolation play in the culture of affluence, and how does it impact adolescents and their parents, individually, and in their relationships with each other?

About the Author

Madeline Levine, Ph.D., has been a practicing clinical psychologist in Marin County for the past twenty-five years. She is the author of *Viewing Violence* and *See No Evil: A Guide to Protecting Our Children from Media Violence*. A frequent lecturer on child and adolescent issues, she lives in California with her husband and three sons.