



## Legislating On Social Media Is No Remedy For Alienation

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It's clear that social media does great damage to the minds and psychological wellbeing of young people. Perhaps legislation can do something to address this, but to try to do so may be to embrace "safetyism" and ignore root causes. To fix the problem of psychological stress exacerbated by social media requires an understanding of why so many young people pour endless hours of their lives into social media, aside from the obvious explanation that during the past two years they were allowed to do little else because of lockdowns.

One explanation is the fracturing of our communities. As psychiatrist Tanveer Ahmed wrote in his book *Fragile Nation*, the psychologically disruptive times we are living in "are in part related to shifting views and battles about what constitutes our nature as traditional structure of authority disintegrate". These structures of authority comprise everything from churches to unions, and families to volunteering organisations.



They are the places where Australians traditionally have found meaning and purpose.

As Ahmed explains, young people are no different from anyone else in that they “want to feel loved and they want to belong to something”. Although there is a range of explanations why young people appear to have more mental health issues than previous generations, the loss of community is an important root cause because it deprives people of the opportunity to feel loved and belong and contribute to something larger than themselves.

That this desire exists can be seen in the fervent embrace of climate catastrophism, which provides a community of mostly young people with rules and norms, a guide for living morally, and the support of others.

In a report this year, the Institute of Public Affairs measured the decline in the health of our communities and society more broadly across the past two decades. The Fair Go – Going, Gone report found that, since 2000, volunteering had declined by 16 per cent, the marriage rate had declined by 24 per cent and the incarceration rate had increased by 33 per cent.

The evidence that our communities have become fractured and that they are no longer able to be the sources of meaning they once were is clear. But this is not necessarily a new problem.

In 1953, American sociologist Robert Nisbet wrote that the “historic triumph of secularism and individualism has presented a set of problems that looms large in contemporary thought. The modern release of the individual from traditional ties of class, religion and kinship has made him free; but ... this freedom is accompanied not by the sense of creative release but by the sense of disenchantment and alienation.

“The alienation of man from historic moral certitudes has been followed by the sense of man’s alienation from fellow man.”

If Nisbet were alive today, he would see in Australia’s young people the typical “quest for community” that characterises all human beings. And he would agree that the law alone cannot fix the problem we face.

Instead, we need to restore the communities central to the Australian way of life. Civic organisations – sporting clubs, RSLs, mutual societies, churches and unions – are the glue that binds society together. Without these organisations we may be free of our “chosen and unchosen obligations” to each other, but we are also deprived of the meaning and purpose they provide.

And this is why legislation will almost certainly fail and, in all likelihood, will contribute further to our problems by undermining our agency. As Ahmed concludes in his book: “We are fundamentally resilient, and constructing vulnerability on a large scale limits recovery and empowerment.”

**Original Link:**

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/legislating-on-social-media-is-no-remedy-for-alienation/news-story/9da97530ddb8dfe82f6ccf80f8c719a8>

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