

Study: The Surprising Connection Between Your Politics and Happiness

Do your politics determine—or at least predict—your mental health? Recent research indicates that the answer is “yes.”

[A study](#) published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* found a correlation between agreement with social justice mantras (colloquially referred to as “wokeness”) and depression, anxiety, and lack of happiness.

As [reported by the New York Post](#), researchers in Finland sent out an assessment to participants that measured symptoms of anxiety, depression, and happiness along with degrees of dedication to social justice ideas.

After examining core tenets of intersectional feminism, critical race theory, postcolonialism, and queer theory, the study authors created a list of principles, which they called “Critical Social Justice Attitude Scale” (CSJAS). The initial CSJAS included statements such as these:

- “If white people have on average a higher level of income than black people, it is because of racism.”
- “University reading lists should include fewer white or European authors.”
- “Microaggressions should be challenged often and actively.”
- “If a white person doesn’t admit they are racist, they are still probably racist.”
- “Trans* women are women.” (* = *born male but identifying as female*)
- “A member of a privileged group can adopt features or cultural elements of a less privileged group.” (*reverse scored*)

- “The police are institutionally racist.”
- “The ideas of Karl Marx should not have more influence in national politics.” (*reverse scored*)
- “Other people or structures are more responsible for my well-being than I myself am.”
- “You should not say things that might offend an oppressed person.”

According to the study, agreement with such statements was positively correlated with anxiety, depression, and unhappiness, though weakly. Overtly identifying as “woke” also paralleled with unhappiness: “Self-reporting as ‘woke’ ... and [being supportive of] CSJAS items were strongly correlated ($r = 0.62$). ... Self-reporting as woke was also correlated with depression, anxiety, and (lack of) happiness.”

In a subsequent iteration of the study involving more participants (5,030 vs. 851 in the first study), the full list of woke statements was reduced to just seven items:

- “If white people have on average a higher level of income than black people, it is because of racism.”
- “University reading lists should include fewer white or European authors.”
- “Microaggressions* should be challenged often and actively. (* = verbal communication or act, which can be seen to reflect negative attitudes towards a minority group, regardless of original intent).”
- “Trans* women who compete with women in sports are not helping women’s rights.” (*reverse scored; * = born male but identifying as female*)
- “We don’t need to talk more about the color of people’s skin.” (*reverse scored*)
- “A white person cannot understand how a black person feels equally [as] well as another black person.”
- “A member of a privileged group can adopt features or cultural elements of a less privileged group.” (*reverse scored*)

The results were substantially the same as in the first study. Agreement with the first item on the scale (“If white people have on average a higher level...”) displayed the largest positive correlation with anxiety and depression and negative correlation with happiness. The connection between negative mental health and these beliefs was the same or slightly weaker than the connection between mental health issues and being politically leftwing in general, according to the study. Interestingly, men were much more likely to reject statements in the CSJAS than women. According to Oskari Lahtinen, “Three out of five women view ‘woke’ ideas positively, but only one out of seven men.”

So, what does all this mean? The findings are not conclusive, of course, since the correlations were weak and the study involved people from just one country, but they do provide a fascinating indication that social justice ideas in general bear some kind of relationship to unhappiness.

What is the nature of that relationship, exactly? Here, we enter the realm of speculation. It’s unclear whether unhappiness leads people to embrace social justice ideas or whether social justice ideas engender unhappiness.

Conservative commentator Matt Walsh [argues](#) that it’s a bit of both: “Wokeness attracts unhappy people, and it also makes people unhappy,” he says. Walsh points out that social justice, with its emphasis on victimhood and oppression, tends to remove human agency and responsibility from life. For those who adhere to such beliefs, this could create a feeling of losing control over one’s own life and future, which is the very essence of anxiety.

Social justice is often predicated on the assumption that the world is inherently unjust. All of life, politics, culture, art, and religion boil down to a brutal battle for power, the oppressor subjugating the oppressed. A mentality that sees the world as unjust and a blind struggle for selfish ends can only

breed sadness, anger, resentment, depression, and anxiety. How could it be otherwise? If you preoccupy yourself with negative thoughts, your mood will suffer. And what could be more negative than always sniffing out injuries and hidden matrices of oppression directed at oneself and others?

Additionally, a person who is *already* unhappy will gravitate to a worldview that seems to justify and explain that unhappiness. If Jane carries some unhealed wounds inside, some feeling of having been injured in her life, it won't be hard to convince her that all of human affairs turn on the axis of oppressor and oppressed, victimhood and exploitation.

Any reputable psychologist would know that paranoia and victimhood complexes are unhealthy. What our culture today has done, however, is take those pathologies and institutionalize them, holding them up as the pinnacle of political, social, academic, and even moral/religious concerns. It is, quite literally, madness. Is it any wonder people are unhappy?

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