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# The Cage We Built

**Paper 4 of the Civilisational Architecture series.**

Instinct Suppression, the Modern Depression Epidemic, and the Political Fracture It Produces

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In John Calhoun's Universe 25, a mouse population supplied with unlimited food, water, and safety, and freed of every predator and pathogen, did not flourish. It disintegrated. The males withdrew from competition and courtship into grooming and inactivity; the females turned on their young; reproduction ceased among animals in perfect physical health, and the colony died out. Nothing was taken from these animals except the necessity of *acting* to obtain what they were given. That turned out to be the one thing they could not survive losing.

The thesis of this paper is that the same mechanism operates in all mammalian populations including humans, and that it is the most parsimonious explanation for a cluster of contemporary findings that the dominant frameworks explain badly or not at all. Organisms do not merely require the satisfaction of their needs; they require the expression of the evolved behavioural pathways through which those needs were historically met. Provide the outcome while removing the pathway, and the organism loses the functional architecture of its own flourishing. The modern developed environment does precisely this, comprehensively and at scale: it supplies the outcomes of instinct expression — security, status, provision, attachment — while systematically closing the pathways through which those outcomes were earned.

The suppression is sex-differentiated, because the evolved repertoires are. The female repertoire — family formation, caregiving, relational and domestic investment, pair-bonding — has been suppressed by *replacement*: the career-achievement frame installed as the exclusive measure of a woman's worth, with family formation recoded as wasted potential. The male repertoire — competition, demonstrated competence, protection, provision — has been suppressed by *condemnation*: the drives themselves designated pathological under the toxic-masculinity narrative, their expression pathways not merely closed but moralised against. The two mechanisms produce two different pathologies. The female vector runs toward internalising depression the sufferer is told to treat with more of its cause. The male vector runs toward externalising withdrawal and resentment, terminating, at the extreme, in a male suicide rate three to four times the female one.

The depression evidence is consistent with this account across independent streams: the wealth-depression correlation and the Easterlin paradox; the geography of depression, highest in the most developed and privileged populations; the sex-differentiated clinical signatures, with female distress over-counted by instruments calibrated to it and male distress under-counted; and the partisan depression differential, sharpest among young progressive women. None of these is what the structural-inequality or resource-scarcity theories predict. All are what instinct-suppression predicts.

Downstream lies the political consequence. Developmentally incomplete individuals are susceptible to totalising identity frameworks that supply the belonging and coherence biological pathways failed to provide; the framework each demographic reaches for is predicted by the suppression it suffered. And the pattern does not stabilise — it intensifies cohort by cohort, because each new cohort matures in an environment more saturated with the preceding one's disorder, and conforms toward it. Smartphones did not cause this. Late Roman, Tang and Song, and Abbasid elites reached the same terminal state with no technology of any kind. Smartphones accelerate it.

The standard response — pharmaceutical and therapeutic management — treats the symptom and leaves the cage intact. It is the equivalent of medicating the zoo lion. The diagnosis here is structural, and so are the implications: the task is not to make life harder, but to stop removing the conditions that make instinct expression both possible and necessary.

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*Paper 4 of 5 in the Prothean Civilisational Architecture series*

## A Note on Method

This paper advances a theory that is, by the standard of the institutions most invested in the question, unproven. It should be read with that standard correctly understood. The absence of a confirmatory published literature is not evidence against an original claim; it is the expected condition of one. The standard is applied in the correct order. Where direct confirming evidence exists for a claim it is cited as confirmation and labelled as such — and much of this argument's spine is so confirmed: the trigger delay, the durable neural reorganisation parenthood produces, and most of the depression evidence below. Where confirmation does not exist — the expected condition for a genuinely novel mechanism — the operative tests are two: whether any evidence *falsifies* the claim, and whether the claim is *consistent* with what is established. Consistency-and-absence-of-contradiction is the standard for the untested links only; it is never offered as a substitute for confirmation where confirmation exists. The predictions on which the theory could be broken are stated explicitly rather than buried. Where the evidence is consistent but not yet decisive, that is said plainly; where a finding would falsify the mechanism and has not, that is said too.

One position is treated differently from the others. The blank slate account of human behaviour — the claim that sex-differentiated dispositions are primarily the product of social conditioning — is not engaged here as a competing scientific hypothesis, because in the serious evolutionary-biological, comparative-psychological, and anthropological literature it is no longer one. It is engaged as what it now is: an ideological position retained by institutional authority against the weight of the evidence. This paper states its evidential weaknesses precisely and names its function. It does not perform balance between a defeated position and the evidence that defeated it. False balance on a settled empirical question is not neutrality; it is deference.

The analytical register throughout is Madisonian in the diagnostic sense. Population-scale outcomes are traced to the structural conditions that make them the predictable response of ordinary people, not to the moral failure of the individuals exhibiting them. People do not become depressed, withdrawn, or politically radicalised because they are weak. They do so because the structures they develop inside have been arranged — by design, by inheritance, or by decay — into a configuration that produces those outcomes from normal human material. The policy task that follows is therefore structural, never moral.

This is the clinical paper of the Prothean Civilisational Architecture series, and it stands in a specific relation to its companion that should be stated at the outset. *The Threshold* and this paper are not a chain in which one is downstream of the other; they are two analyses of a single structural condition — the modern substitution of provided outcome for required action. *The Threshold* develops one consequence of that condition: the failure of a one-time developmental transition, maturation, when the sustained non-optional responsibility that triggers it is removed. This paper develops a second, co-ordinate consequence: the chronic pathology produced when the same condition supplies-around the broader evolved instinct repertoire, whose expression is a continuous requirement rather than a one-time gate. Neither mechanism is upstream of the other; they couple at a shared keystone — responsibility for a dependent — which is at once the maturation trigger and the central instinct-expression pathway. The claims here are tiered as that companion paper tiers its own: the instinct-expression thesis and the sex-differentiated suppression vectors are advanced as strong inferences; the political extension, and the precise empirical separation of this paper's mechanism from the developmental one, are flagged where they reach beyond what the evidence yet settles. *The Invisible Path* develops the policy programme the diagnosis implies.

One further relation within the series must be made explicit, because without it this paper appears to contradict its companions. The argument here treats the suppression of instinct as pathogenic, while Thus Spake Ilos treats the suppression of particular instincts — male polygamy, female hypergamy — as civilisationally productive, indeed as the mechanism by

which durable societies are built. The two claims are reconciled by the keystone on which this entire argument turns: required action. What is pathogenic is not the constraint of a drive but the removal of the pathway through which it is expressed. The monogamy norm does not supply a man the outcomes of status, attachment, and reproduction while excusing him from earning them; it constrains the target of the drive to a single legitimate channel and thereby raises the requirement to act — he must provide, commit, compete, and protect to obtain and keep what the norm makes available. The drive is redirected, not discharged for free, and the expression pathway is preserved and, if anything, intensified. The cage is the precise inverse: it supplies the outcome and removes the requirement to act for it at all. Adaptive constraint narrows where a drive may be expressed while still demanding its expression; pathological provision satisfies the drive while requiring nothing. A norm that channels an instinct into a narrower and more demanding pathway is therefore not an instance of the suppression this paper indicts — it is its opposite, and the variable that separates the two, here as throughout, is whether action is still required.

# 1. Universe 25 and the Instinct-Expression Thesis

## 1a. The Experimental Demonstration

Between 1968 and 1972, John B. Calhoun built a utopia for mice and watched them die inexplicably. Universe 25 was an enclosure engineered to eliminate every survival stressor a mouse population faces in nature: unlimited food and water, abundant nesting material, a controlled climate, no predators, no disease. Every biological need was met without the animal having to do anything to meet it. The welfare-maximisation model of flourishing — more resources, more wellbeing — predicts that such a population should thrive. It predicted wrongly, and the manner of its failure is the conceptual foundation of this paper.

The colony grew, plateaued, and then declined to extinction. The decline was not driven by scarcity, because there was no scarcity. It was driven by behavioural disintegration. As density rose and every role that struggle would normally have allocated became meaningless, the social structure that organised mouse life collapsed. The most documented pathology was male, and it is the single most important finding here. A cohort of physically perfect males — Calhoun called them "the beautiful ones" — withdrew entirely from the behavioural repertoire they had evolved to express. They did not compete, defend territory, or pursue opposite sex mates. They ate, slept, groomed themselves to an immaculate sheen, and did nothing else. They were, in every physical respect, healthy. In every functional respect, they were already gone.

The female pathology ran in parallel and was equally diagnostic: maternal behaviour decayed, aggression toward offspring rose, and reproduction ceased among healthy animals with unlimited access to everything reproduction requires. The colony did not run out of anything. It ran out of the *behaviour* that constituted its own continuation.

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*The mouse did not need food. It needed to forage for food. It did not need safety, but to defend territory; not offspring, but to pursue, court, and protect them. Remove the expression pathway while supplying the outcome, and the organism loses not its resources but the architecture of its own flourishing.*

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The experiment was run several times and always resulted in the same outcomes.

This is the mechanism, stated as precisely as the evidence allows: evolved organisms require the *expression* of their behavioural pathways, not merely the satisfaction of the outcomes those pathways evolved to produce. It is not a metaphor reaching for resonance. It is a documented experimental result, and it has direct predictive force for any population subjected to the same structural condition — the provision of outcomes without the requirement of action. The parallel between the beautiful ones and the contemporary cohort of healthy young men withdrawing from work, purpose and family formation, into gaming, pornography, aesthetic self-cultivation and same-sex relationships is not offered as an analogy. It is offered as the same mechanism operating in the same class of organism, and the rest of this paper is the case for taking it literally.

The female pathology has its own contemporary equivalent, and it should be named alongside the male one rather than left implicit. The Universe 25 females did not withdraw into grooming; they turned on the maternal role itself — ceasing to nurture, neglecting or attacking their young. The human equivalent is not the absence of the caregiving drive but its diversion and attenuation: the drive discharged onto substitutes, maternal investment deferred and outsourced, and, at the extreme the data will show, rising maternal disaffection. Both sexes fail in the way Universe 25 predicts, each through its own evolved repertoire.

## 1b. The Corroboration from Captivity

Universe 25 was a single experiment, even run multiple times, a structural theory requires greater evidence. The naturalistic corroboration is broad and unambiguous, and it is found wherever animals are held in conditions of total provision: the literature on captive-animal welfare and environmental enrichment. Across a wide range of species, animals supplied with unlimited food and complete safety nonetheless develop stereotypic behaviours, self-harm, reproductive failure, and states that meet every behavioural criterion for depression. The cause is not deprivation of resources, because resources are abundant. It is deprivation of the *conditions that require the expression of the evolved repertoire*.

What makes this corroboration powerful rather than merely suggestive is the management response it produced. Modern zoological practice did not address captive depression by adding more food or more safety; it addressed it by reintroducing the requirement of effort — concealing food so it must be sought, building environments that must be navigated, restoring the conditions under which the animal must *do* what it evolved to do in order to obtain what it needs. The lion is fed and still must be made to hunt; the elephant is provisioned and still must be made to forage. The intervention works. That it works is the empirical validation of the mechanism: the organism requires the expression pathway, and restoring the pathway restores function even when the outcome was never in question.

Nor is the corroboration confined to animals. A third demonstration sits between the captive-animal evidence and the population data, at the scale of the single family, and it is the most familiar of all because almost every culture has independently coined a proverb for it. What English calls ‘shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations’ — the Lancashire ‘clogs to clogs,’ the Chinese saying that wealth never survives three generations, the family-firm literature’s *Buddenbrooks effect* — names a recurrent trajectory: the founder builds an estate through sustained struggle; the second generation, raised alongside the memory of that struggle, largely preserves it; the third, supplied the outcomes of status, security, and provision without ever having had to act to obtain them, characteristically loses the drive that built the estate and dissipates it. The natural control is unusually clean for a human observation. The wealth is held constant or rising, the genetic line is the same, and the educational investment is typically greater rather than smaller — yet effectiveness collapses. What varies across the three generations is not resources or capacity but the relation to struggle, the single variable this paper isolates. The heir is the beautiful one with a surname. The dominant phenotype is itself diagnostic: the third generation is characteristically not depressed in the clinical sense so much as becalmed — aimless, purposeless, ineffective — which is the more exact description of what the removal of instinct-expression produces, with depression a frequent secondary expression rather than the primary one. The pattern’s limits should be stated in keeping with this paper’s standard: the survival statistics often quoted for family firms are methodologically soft, and rival mechanisms — regression toward the mean from an exceptional founder, the dilution of ownership across successively more heirs, the simple non-heritability of the founder’s particular talent — contribute to the financial outcome. None of them, however, accounts for the universality of the *behavioural* pattern across cultures that share no common business structure; and it is the behavioural signature, not the balance sheet, that corroborates the mechanism here. Read at the largest scale, the same dynamic is the subject of the historical comparators below: a developed world built by a generation that struggled, inherited by one that still remembered the struggle, and now spent by a third that has known only the provision.

## 1c. The Easterlin Paradox and the Geography of Depression

If the mechanism operates in humans, it should leave a signature in the relationship between material abundance and wellbeing — and it does, in one of the most robust and most awkward findings in happiness economics. Above a threshold sufficient to meet survival needs, additional wealth produces little or no additional happiness, and is frequently associated with *higher* rates of depression — the Easterlin paradox. The welfare-maximisation model has

never explained this comfortably. The instinct-suppression thesis explains it directly. Wealth above the survival threshold does not raise flourishing, because flourishing was never a function of outcomes alone. What additional wealth reliably does is increase the degree to which outcomes are supplied without the expression pathways that produce them. The affluent person does not forage, compete for territory, or struggle for provision. The very success of the modern economic order in delivering outcomes without struggle is the mechanism generating the disaffection it cannot account for.

The same signature appears at the population scale, and there it is starker still. Rates of depression are consistently highest in the most developed, most affluent, most secure societies, and lowest in the least developed and most resource-constrained ones. The structural-inequality theory of depression predicts the reverse; the resource-scarcity theory predicts the reverse; both are falsified by the geography. The instinct-suppression thesis predicts the geography exactly, because development is precisely the process of replacing instinct expression with its provided outcome. This is the first of the paper's falsifiable commitments, and it is stated as such: were depression to track scarcity rather than abundance across populations, the mechanism proposed here would be in serious trouble. It does not. It tracks abundance — which is to say, it tracks the cage.

It is worth stating the through-line of this section plainly, while marking its limits. The most parsimonious reading of these converging streams is that a major driver of the modern depression epidemic — plausibly the dominant one at population scale — is the systematic removal of instinct-expression. This is not a claim that it is the only cause: heritable vulnerability, acute stressors, and organic illness all contribute, and nothing here disputes them. The claim is narrower and harder to dismiss — that the population-scale signature, depression rising with abundance, security, and provision, is what instinct-suppression predicts and what the rival accounts get backwards.

The same logic predicts a gradient by the degree to which a person's daily activity still requires the expression of evolved drives. The robust end of the evidence is the floor: unemployment and enforced idleness produce large, lasting increases in depression, and the mechanism the literature identifies is not lost income but the inability to discharge the drive to contribute — work as instinct-expression, not work as wage. The agentic end is consistent but noisier: autonomous, productive work — the founder building and provisioning — trends toward higher meaning and lower depression, though confounded by stress and by healthier individuals selecting into it. If the gradient holds, it carries a policy implication Section 6 returns to: what protects mental health is not transferred resource but required, productive action — precisely what passive welfare removes.

## 2. Sex-Differentiated Instinct Repertoires and the Modern Suppression Environment

### 2a. A Digital Pet, and What It Proved

In late 1996 a Japanese company released a keychain toy with a monochrome screen, a few dozen pixels, and a schedule of beeps. It had no warmth, no scent, no reciprocity, no recognition of the child holding it, and no actual need that any care could meet. It demanded to be "fed" and "cleaned" on a timer, and if neglected it "died." Roughly forty million units sold in eighteen months, overwhelmingly to girls between the ages of eight and fourteen. They carried the devices to school in defiance of bans, set alarms to wake in the night and tend them, and wept when the pixels died, in full and explicit knowledge that the creature had never been alive.

The Tamagotchi is the cleanest available natural experiment in instinct activation, and it makes three points the rest of this section depends on. First, it falsifies the social-construction account of the maternal-caregiving instinct directly. These were girls of an age at which, as *The Threshold* argues, the maternal-caregiving instinct is already being primed ahead of the peak-fertility window that opens a few years later — responding, well before any plausible occasion to use it, with measurable behavioural and emotional intensity to a stimulus that resembled an infant's demand cues only in the most schematic way. The instinct did not have to be taught. It had only to be *triggered*, and the threshold for triggering it sat far below what the conditioning account predicts. Second — and this is the contribution specific to this paper — the case exposes a pattern that recurs across the modern lifecourse: the **substrate-and-substitute** pattern. The instinct fires; it discharges onto a substitute that requires nothing of the developmental pathway the instinct evolved to open; the pathway never engages; and the pattern repeats across a ladder of substitutes — virtual pets, then parasocial attachments, then, for some, companion animals kept explicitly as children. The instinct expresses. The development that expression was meant to initiate does not occur. Third, the case sharpens the intervention question that Section 6 takes up: the standard pro-natal response operates as though the instinct must be reinstalled by cultural messaging. The Tamagotchi shows it needs no reinstalling. What it needs is the developmental-window opportunity to express against its evolved target rather than a substitute.

The point has a harder confirmation than a toy's sales figures — from a programme designed to prove the opposite. Between 2003 and 2006 a school-based cluster-randomised controlled trial in Western Australia gave more than a thousand teenage girls an infant simulator — a programmable doll that cries through the night and must be fed, changed, and soothed on demand — on the universal assumption that a week of exhausting pseudo-parenthood would deter them from the real thing. It did the reverse: the girls who carried the simulator went on to *higher* rates of both birth and abortion by age twenty than the controls who received standard sex education — 8% had given birth against 4% of controls, a 36% higher risk of pregnancy overall. The result baffled its designers because they held the social-construction model — caregiving as a learned burden to be discouraged. On the instinct-activation model it is unsurprising: handing an adolescent girl, inside the priming window, a dependent to tend does not teach her that babies are unpleasant, it *fires the maternal repertoire*, exactly as the Tamagotchi did — only here the activation was strong enough to move real reproductive behaviour against the intervention's entire intent. A deterrence programme built on the wrong model of human nature did not fail neutrally; it produced the opposite of its goal. It is the cleanest evidence in this section that the instinct is not installed but triggered, and that triggering it has consequences in the world.

The sex asymmetry in the data is itself evidence. Boys bought Tamagotchis too, in smaller numbers and with markedly lower intensity. This is what the sex-differentiated calibration of the caregiving instinct predicts: the female system is tuned to fire on minimal, schematic cues,

while the male caregiving system generally requires the integrated context of an established relationship and a recognised, present dependent. A toy that triggers one far more readily than the other is a small but specific datum for exactly the architecture this section now sets out.

The asymmetry runs deeper than purchase intensity. Male caregiving is, in evolved terms, weighted toward provisioning and protection rather than direct nurture, and it matures later — closer to the male trigger window *The Threshold* places well into the late teens, by which age the boys in question were long past buying a keychain pet. Where the male equivalent of the Tamagotchi appears, it is not a creature to be fed but a world to be built, defended, and provisioned: the enduring pull of construction-and-stewardship games — SimCity, the simulation farms, Age of Empires, the more recent provider-role titles — is the same instinct firing on a substitute, calibrated to the male repertoire rather than the female one. The substrate-and-substitute pattern is general; only its target is sex-typed.

The clearest contemporary demonstration arrived thirty years after the Tamagotchi, and sex-inverted. *Pragmata* (2026), built around a man's protection of and provision for Diana — an android in the form of a small girl, wholly dependent on him — activated the male protective-paternal instinct at scale: it sold a million copies in two days, and the characteristic response was not desire but guardianship, players reporting "I would die for this kid" and "it makes me want to have children." Where the Tamagotchi fired the female caregiving instinct on a creature to be nurtured, *Pragmata* fired the male instinct on a dependent to be protected and provided for. The cue is minimal and the target a substitute in both; only the evolved shape of the response differs.

## 2b. The Biological Baseline and the Paradox That Settles It

That male and female humans carry partially distinct evolved behavioural repertoires is, in the relevant scientific fields, among the most replicated findings available. The dispositions appear across cultures including those with minimal Western contact; they appear in non-human primates that cannot have been socially conditioned into them; and — decisively — they *widen* rather than narrow in the most gender-equal societies. The male primary repertoire centres on competition for status and resources, the achievement of demonstrable competence, the protection of territory and family, provision for dependents, and the pursuit of a mate. The female primary repertoire centres on family formation, caregiving, relational investment, provision within the domestic sphere, and the maintenance of pair-bonds. Neither set is a pathology and neither is a limitation. Each is the set of expression pathways through which one sex historically reached the outcomes — security, belonging, reproduction, status — that constitute biological flourishing.

The gender-equality paradox deserves to be stated without the hedging it is usually given, because it is the single most powerful falsification of the blank-slate prediction in the entire literature. If sex-differentiated behaviour were primarily the residue of social pressure, then removing that pressure would produce convergence. In the societies that have removed the most pressure — the Nordic states above all — the differences are not smaller. They are larger. Occupational preference, personality profile, and behavioural disposition all diverge further as equality of opportunity increases. This is the precise signature of a biological disposition expressing itself once social constraint is lifted, and it is the exact opposite of what the blank slate predicts. A theory that predicts convergence and observes divergence has been falsified. Section 5 returns to why the falsified theory nonetheless retains institutional authority; for the argument here, it is enough to establish that the repertoires are real, and to proceed.

This section draws on the developmental mechanism established in *The Threshold*, which it takes as given rather than re-deriving. There the adolescent feature-set is shown to have two components — a developmental *substrate* (the maturational readiness a completion-trigger operates on) and the visible behavioural *expression*. The modern pipeline dismantles the substrate while leaving expression intact, and the two suppression vectors below are, in that

paper's terms, the dismantling of the female entry-state and of the male pre-trigger pathway respectively. The Tamagotchi case illustrates the distinction in compressed form: the caregiving instinct's *expression* fires on minimal cue regardless of whether the developmental *substrate* it should engage has been dismantled, because the two mechanisms are independent. The suppression this paper develops operates on the expression mechanism, where Threshold's dismantling operates on the substrate — two complementary routes to the same population-scale signature.

## 2c. The Female Suppression Vector: Replacement

The career-achievement frame did not add a choice to the female menu. It redefined the menu. Presented as liberation, its operative effect was to install a single masculine standard of valuation — paid achievement outside the home — as the exclusive source of female identity and social worth, and to recode the primary female repertoire as the absence of achievement. A woman who prioritises family formation is not met with a different but equally honoured choice; she is met with the verdict that she has wasted her potential, deferred her development, or failed at liberation. This is suppression by replacement: the expression pathway is not attacked, it is devalued to nothing, and a substitute is installed in the place where its social worth used to sit.

It is the most complete of the suppression vectors precisely because it is invisible to its subject. A woman experiencing the depression of frustrated instinct is told, by every authoritative voice around her, that the remedy is more of the thing producing it — more career, more independence, more liberation from the very pathways whose closure is the cause. The feedback loop is sealed against self-correction; the distress is read as evidence of insufficient progress toward the goal that is generating the distress. The pornography-analogue for women operates through the same logic in the relational domain: romantic media, validation markets, and hookup culture deliver the *outcome* — male attention, the sensation of being chosen — while removing the behavioural pathway, committed pair-bonding and family formation, through which that outcome was historically converted into anything durable. The organism receives the resource and is denied the structure that would have made it nourishing. It is Universe 25 in the relational register.

The maternal side of the Universe 25 result belongs here too, and the parallel is uncomfortable but exact. Calhoun's females, under total provision, did not merely decline to reproduce; those that did increasingly failed to nurture — abandoning, neglecting, or attacking their young and other mothers. The structural analogue in the human case is not a moral indictment of mothers but the same mechanism: a culture that supplies the outcome — a child can be safely housed, fed, and minded by others from the earliest months — while removing the requirement to express the caregiving repertoire directly attenuates that expression, with the routine outsourcing of infant care from around three months one of its most visible institutional forms.

The smartphone belongs here, but as an accelerant, not a cause. What the device does is multiply the substitutes and shorten the distance to them: the substrate-and-substitute ladder that once ran through physical pets and parasocial figures now runs through an endless, frictionless supply of validation, virtual care, and simulated attachment, available at every idle moment. The suppression mechanism is not technological and predates the technology; the phone simply lowers the activation cost of every substitute and raises the rate at which the instinct discharges onto something that engages no developmental pathway at all.

## 2d. The Male Suppression Vector: Condemnation

The male repertoire was suppressed by a different and, in its psychological consequences, more volatile mechanism. It was not replaced; it was condemned. Under the toxic-masculinity narrative, the male drives toward competition, achievement, protection, and dominance are

not redirected into an alternative frame — they are designated as defective at the source. The expression pathways are not merely closed; their moral legitimacy is revoked. This produces a response categorically different from the quiet, internalising depression of replaced instinct. It produces the externalising resentment of an organism whose constitutive drives have been told they are the problem.

The same programme works the other side of the ledger: alongside condemning the male repertoire, it valorises feminine traits in men — emotional availability, deference, compliance, the surrender of dominance — as the mark of the acceptable modern male. The prescription is incoherent with revealed female preference, since women do not, in mate choice, reward the traits it prescribes; the result is a double bind in which a man is condemned for what he is and rewarded for what repels, with no expressible resolution.

The reaction to *Pragmata* is the condemnation vector caught in the open. A real but tiny minority did sexualise the character — enough to get a fan forum removed — and that minority became the pretext for the larger and more revealing move: the *protective* response itself was pathologised. Mainstream coverage treated men reporting paternal, guardian feelings as suspect — creepy, "proving their masculinity," dog-whistling — folding the wholesome majority into the degenerate fringe by association. This is the mechanism in miniature: take a minority pathology, use it to stain the drive entire, and leave the ordinary man who felt the pull of protectiveness unable to express it without suspicion. The asymmetry is the tell: the equivalent female response — maternal feeling toward a child-character — draws no such policing. Express the instinct and be marked; suppress it and withdraw. (This is media discourse, not measurement, offered as a live instance of the mechanism rather than proof of it.)

The beautiful ones are the human reference case, and the parallel should be stated without apology because the evidence supports it without apology. The cohort of young men retreating from competition, courtship, and purpose into gaming, pornography, and aesthetic self-cultivation and same-sex relationships is exhibiting the Universe 25 withdrawal pathology in the same organism class through the same mechanism: the conditions requiring instinct expression have been removed by the universal provision of outcomes without struggle, and the drives themselves have been morally condemned. Withdrawal is not the moral failure the narrative reads it as. It is the predicted rational response of an organism offered no legitimate pathway for what it is built to do. Section 3 takes up the terminal expression of this vector — a male suicide rate three to four times the female — not as a mental-health mystery but as the outcome the mechanism predicts.

### 3. The Depression Evidence

The claim of this section is deliberately calibrated. It is not that instinct suppression has been proven the sole cause of the depression epidemic; that standard of proof is unavailable for any structural theory of a population-scale phenomenon, and claiming it would be dishonest. The claim is that the depression data, across several independent streams, is *consistent with* the instinct-suppression thesis and is, in key respects, what that thesis uniquely predicts and what the dominant alternatives get wrong. Consistency across independent streams, in the absence of falsifying evidence, is the available standard, and it is the one applied here.

#### 3a. Female Depression and the Calibration of the Instruments

Women are diagnosed with depression at substantially higher rates than men across virtually every Western country, and the standard explanation attributes the gap to structural disadvantage and gender-based stress. That explanation is falsified by the same geography that falsifies the scarcity theory: female depression is highest not in the most oppressed female populations but in the most equal, affluent, and liberated ones. The instinct-suppression thesis predicts this directly — the suppression by replacement runs deepest precisely where the career-achievement frame has most thoroughly displaced the family-formation repertoire, which is to say in the most developed societies.

A more tentative signature points the same way, and the honesty the standard requires is to flag that the evidence here is genuinely mixed: studies of postpartum depression by maternal age do not show a clean positive association, and some find none, though particular subgroups — older first-time mothers of multiples, for instance — do show elevated risk. To the extent an age effect exists, it is the clinical face of the age-magnitude relationship the developmental account predicts: the later the trigger arrives against a substrate shaped for a decade by other demands, the harder the reorganisation it must force. The claim is offered at that strength — consistent and predicted, not established.

A measurement caveat is essential here, and it cuts against a naive reading of the raw gap. Clinical depression instruments are calibrated to a female pattern of symptom expression — internalising, mood-focused, articulated and brought to clinical attention. Male depression expresses substantially through externalising channels: aggression, risk-taking, substance use, and withdrawal, none of which the standard instruments are built to capture. The consequence is that the raw diagnosis gap *overstates* the female-male differential, while the suicide gap — male rates three to four times female — *understates* the male burden by counting only its terminal expression. The honest reading is not that women are suffering and men are not. It is that both sexes are experiencing instinct-frustration pathology at high rates, expressed through sex-differentiated channels, one of which the diagnostic apparatus sees clearly and the other of which it largely misses. This is itself a falsifiable prediction: were the clinical signatures of male and female depression found to be identical, the sex-differentiated-suppression account would be in difficulty. They are not identical; they diverge along precisely the lines the evolved repertoires predict.

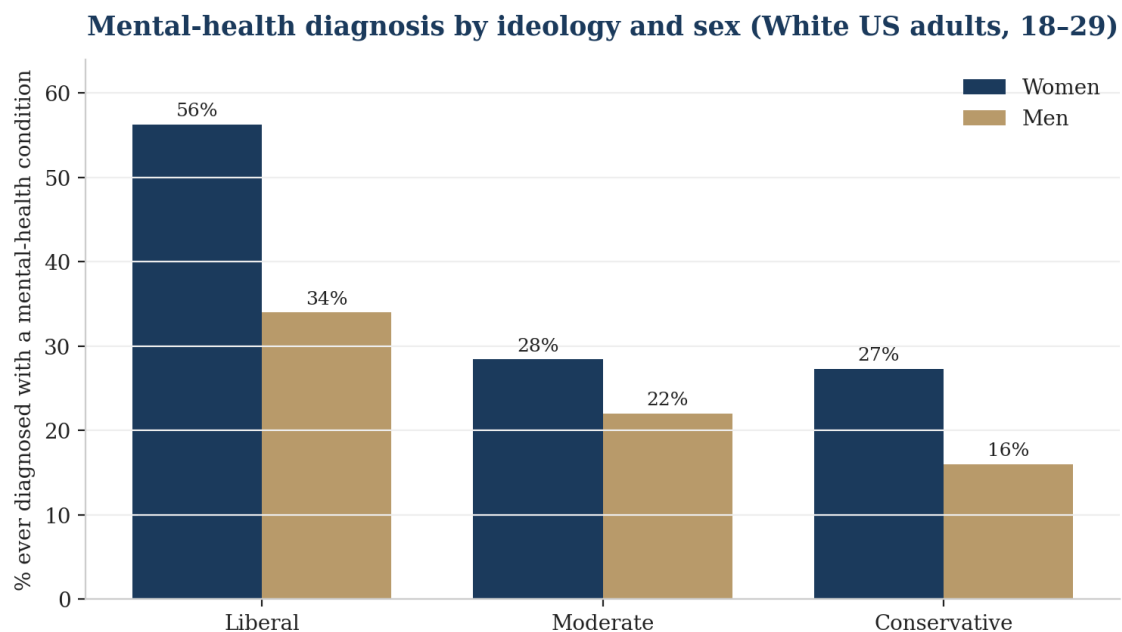
The population-scale signature ties the streams together. Wealth is produced by the educational-and-professional pipeline; the pipeline is also the mechanism that delays family formation and dismantles the developmental substrate; and so wealth correlates with delay correlates with developmental incompleteness. The inverse income-fertility correlation established in *The Threshold* is the demographic face of this, and the depression-by-income-bracket data is its clinical face. Depression highest in the wealthiest populations is not the anomaly the conventional literature treats it as. It is the predicted signature, and the Easterlin paradox is the same signature read at the level of the individual income bracket.

#### 3b. Male Suicide and the Withdrawal Cohort

The male suicide rate, three to four times the female across the developed world and concentrated in the demographic most marked by withdrawal from competition, relationship, and purpose, is the terminal expression of the male suppression vector. The mechanism is specific. The woman experiencing the dissonance of frustrated instinct retains, however imperfectly, a legible clinical channel and a culture of help-seeking through which some of the pressure is expressed and partially relieved. The man whose expression pathways have been closed and whose drives have been morally condemned has neither a legitimate outlet nor an instrument that registers his distress until it terminates. The asymmetry in outcomes follows from the asymmetry in mechanism.

The withdrawal cohort — the NEET population, the hikikomori, the involuntarily celibate and withdrawn — is the human instantiation of the beautiful ones, and it is the most under-studied population in the field for exactly the reason the mechanism predicts: it does not present. Physically healthy, materially provisioned, and entirely withdrawn from — or unable to express — the evolved behavioural repertoire, this cohort almost certainly carries catastrophic depression rates that go almost entirely uncounted. The clinical apparatus is built around the patient who comes in and expresses the female depression pathology; these men do not.

### 3c. The Partisan Depression Differential



Source: Goldberg analysis of Pew Research American Trends Panel, Wave 64 (2020).

Figure 1. Mental-health diagnosis by ideology and sex (White US adults, 18-29). Source: Goldberg analysis of Pew Research American Trends Panel, Wave 64 (2020).

The most politically charged stream is also one of the most robust. Across multiple independent survey datasets, self-identified progressives report markedly higher rates of depression, anxiety, and mental-health treatment than conservatives; the gap has widened over the past decade and is most pronounced among young progressive women. Three explanations are in play, and intellectual honesty requires holding all three: an instinct-alignment effect, in which behaviour clusters more common in traditional populations — family formation, religious practice, community rootedness, defined social roles — happen to track the instinct-expression pathways this paper identifies as productive of flourishing; a trait-distribution effect, in which progressive identification correlates with higher baseline neuroticism independently of any political environment; and an environmental effect, in which sustained exposure to threat-centred political narratives is itself depressogenic. All three are probably partly true.

The instinct-alignment mechanism is the novel contribution, and it is advanced as *consistent with* the data, not as its sole cause. The behavioural clusters more prevalent in traditional populations are, structurally, the expression pathways the thesis identifies as flourishing-productive; that the populations practising them report lower depression is what the thesis predicts. The corresponding falsifiable commitment is explicit: were the partisan differential to vanish or invert once the confounds were controlled, the prediction would fail. It does not vanish. It tracks suppression, and it widens as suppression intensifies — which sets up the question Section 4 must answer, because a differential that *widens cohort by cohort* is not explained by any account that treats each cohort's condition as self-contained.

A final mechanism belongs to the depression evidence but pays off in the political section, and it is flagged here and developed there: the depression signature is *amplified by conformity*. Where the surrounding adult population a maturing cohort encounters is itself carrying the depressive register of frustrated instinct, the cohort conforms toward that register before its own development has run its course. The clinical burden of each cohort is therefore not merely the product of its own suppression; it is inflated by conformity to the disorder already ambient around it. That is the structural origin of the across-cohort intensification, and it is the hinge between the clinical argument and the political one.

## 4. The Political Radicalisation Consequence

This is the most original argument in the paper and the most certain to be attacked, and it is therefore written to be the most precise. It is an argument about a developmental mechanism, not a political judgment. It does not claim that one side of the political divide is correct and the other pathological; it claims that the *same* upstream cause drives different demographics toward opposite political destinations, and that the destination each reaches is predicted by the suppression each suffered. A reader looking for partisan endorsement will not find one — with a single honest qualification. If human flourishing is taken as the preferred outcome, then a frame that permits fuller instinct-expression is, to that extent, implicitly endorsed by the evidence: not because it is “conservative,” but because it produces the better mental-health outcome. The argument stays about mechanism, not party; it simply does not pretend the mechanism is neutral about flourishing.

### 4a. The Mechanism: Incompleteness and the Search for a Framework

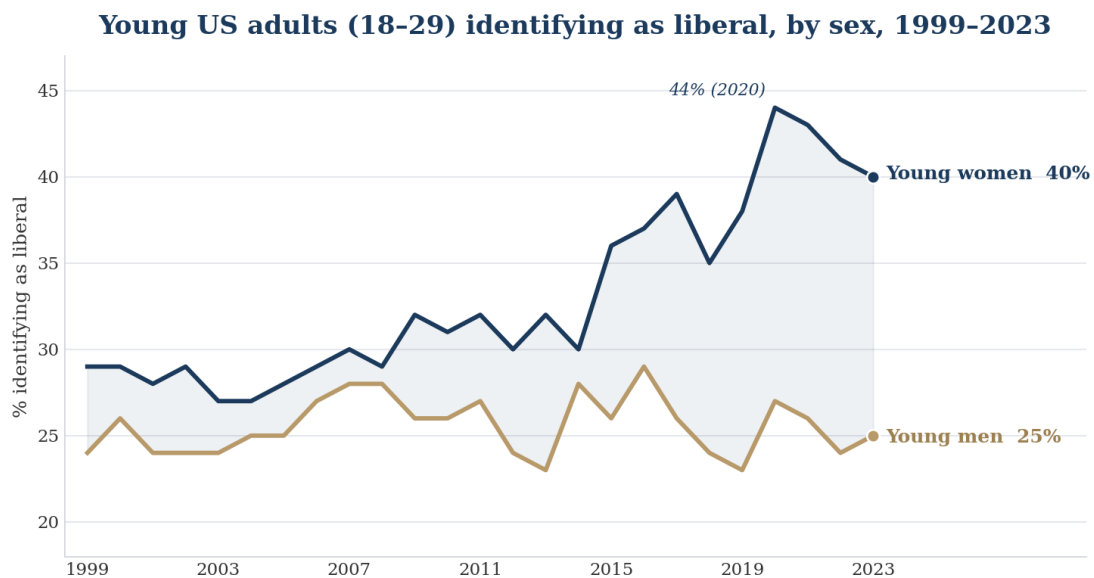
*The Threshold* establishes the developmental mechanism this section draws on: maturation is a triggered transition, not a timed one, and it fails to complete when the modern condition removes the trigger — sustained, non-optional responsibility for a dependent. That failure and the instinct suppression this paper has developed are *co-ordinate* consequences of the same structural condition, coupled at the keystone pathway of family formation; the developmental incompleteness invoked here is the Threshold's mechanism, not a product of instinct suppression, though the suppression of the instinctual responsiveness the trigger recruits is plausibly a second route to the same arrested state. The clinical consequence of the incomplete transition is the depression of Section 3 — though incompleteness does not switch instinct off. The arrested adult goes on expressing the repertoire, but in its unconverted, adolescent register: impulsive, present-oriented, status-anxious, the drives discharging without the mature structure that would channel them. Maladaptive instinct-expression is not the absence of instinct; it is instinct without its completed container. The political consequence follows from the properties of the unconverted state itself: the adolescent register is built for group-belonging over individuated judgement, short horizons over deferred reasoning, and felt certainty over logical scrutiny — precisely the cognitive profile on which tribal identity forms most readily. Totalising frameworks are therefore not merely attractive to the arrested adult; they are easy for that mind to adopt, supplying ready-made the belonging, purpose, and coherent identity the biological pathway failed to deliver, and asking for exactly the kind of cognition the unconverted state already runs. This susceptibility is not specific to any politics. Religious cults, nationalist movements, progressive identity politics, and the communities of withdrawn, sexually-excluded young men are, at the structural level, the same phenomenon: a developmental vacancy seeking something to fill it. The content differs entirely. The mechanism is identical, and recognising that identity is the analytical key to the section.

### 4b. The Female Vector: Progressive Identity as Developmental Substitute

The young woman whose family-formation repertoire has been suppressed by the career-achievement frame arrives at adulthood with the specific vacancy that progressive identity is unusually well-shaped to fill. The framework offers a complete package: a clear in-group, a cosmology that assigns meaning to suffering and struggle, legible villains, and — critically — the peer-validation that the persistent entry-state is calibrated to seek. It also supplies surrogate dependents for the unspent caregiving drive: the framework's designated victims — the migrant, the offender, the marginalised — recast as children who are troubled only for want of sufficient care, toward whom the frustrated maternal repertoire discharges as boundless protective empathy (the misfiring of an evolved drive at civilisational scale that Gad Saad terms *suicidal empathy*). The gravitation is not, at root, a considered political evaluation. It is developmental need-satisfaction. A woman whose instinct-expression pathways have

been closed finds in the framework the belonging and coherence that family formation would otherwise have supplied, and she finds it through the same status-and-validation channels her unconverted entry-state is tuned to.

The empirical signature is the most dramatic political gender divergence in the history of polling: young women across the developed democracies identifying as progressive at rates that now sharply exceed young men, with the gap widening year on year. The widening is simultaneous with, and predicted by, the deepening of the career-achievement suppression and the intensification of the identity offer.



Source: Gallup Poll Social Series — annual surveys of 18–29-year-olds, 1999–2023 (annual series as charted by Axios Visuals, 2024). Values read from the published annual series; period means reproduce Gallup’s reported averages (women 28/32/40%, men 25/27/25%).

*Figure 2. Young US adults (18–29) identifying as liberal, by sex, annual 1999–2023. Young women’s share moved from the high-20s through the 2000s to a peak of 44% in 2020, settling at 40% by 2023; young men’s share stayed flat in the mid-20s. The gap — negligible before about 2015 — widens to roughly fifteen points. Source: Gallup Poll Social Series, annual surveys of 18–29-year-olds; annual series as charted by Axios Visuals (2024).*

#### 4c. The Male Vector: Nationalist and Traditionalist Identity as Validation

The young man whose repertoire has been condemned rather than replaced gravitates in the opposite political direction, and the opposition is a function of the mechanism, not a coincidence. Where the female suppression closed a pathway and installed a substitute, the male suppression attacked the drive itself and offered nothing. The frameworks that draw these men are therefore those that *validate* the condemned drives rather than pathologising them — nationalist, traditionalist, explicitly anti-progressive identities that tell a man his instincts toward competence, protection, and provision are legitimate rather than toxic. The resulting resentment is more explosive and less easily redirected than the female vector’s, for a structural reason: a woman whose career has not delivered the promised fulfilment rarely connects the dissatisfaction to instinct suppression, because the suppression is invisible; a man explicitly told that his nature is the problem has been handed a legible target for his grievance.

Denied a legitimate outlet, the drive routes to substitutes and to whoever will affirm it. The male repertoire now discharges heavily through virtual worlds — competition and mastery in gaming, the simulated provisioning of strategy titles, the counterfeit mating success of pornography — and the demand for validation of the condemned drives has built a large attention economy to meet it: the Tate phenomenon, the manosphere podcasts, commentators such as Pearl Davis, Jordan Petersen and the Wilsons, and, at the more substantive end, a

marked young-male turn toward Orthodox Christianity and Islam. The seriousness varies wildly; the demand each serves is identical — an instinct told it is toxic seeking somewhere it is told it is legitimate.

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*The toxic-masculinity narrative is a self-fulfilling radicalisation mechanism. By designating the male repertoire pathological, it removes the legitimate pathways that would channel those drives constructively — and thereby produces the resentment and framework-seeking it claims to be preventing. The outcome is the predicted rational response to the structure, not evidence of the pathology the narrative asserts.*

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#### **4d. The Shame–Honour Asymmetry**

A specific feature of the modern enforcement environment compounds both vectors and bears most heavily on the male one. Tribal moral enforcement operated through two mechanisms in balance: shame for defection and honour for contribution — a punishment architecture and a reward architecture. Contemporary reputation systems, and social-media enforcement above all, have reconstructed the shame mechanism at enormous scale while almost entirely failing to reconstruct the honour mechanism. The result is a punishment architecture without a corresponding reward architecture, and the asymmetry is itself a depression vector independent of the political content of any particular enforcement. The contributing member of a modern community receives, for equivalent contribution, far less positive reinforcement than a grandparent would have received, and far more punishment for any failure to track the latest enforced position. The arrangement is structurally depressogenic regardless of which positions are being enforced. It bears hardest on men because the male suppression does not merely withhold the honour that competence and provision once earned — it converts the display of those drives into an occasion for active shame. The man is not merely unrewarded for what he is built to do; he is punished for it.

And the punishment is no longer only reputational. The householder who repels an intruder, or the passenger who subdues a violent threat to a railway carriage — Daniel Penny is the recent archetype — increasingly finds that the protective act itself invites prosecution, and a public trial that operates as the punishment irrespective of the verdict; in England the pattern grew acute enough to force statutory protection for householders. The pre-emptive form is starker still: across almost every Australian jurisdiction it is an offence to carry a knife or pepper spray, and self-defence is the single purpose the law expressly declines to recognise as legitimate — the tradesman may carry the blade, the fisherman may, the man who carries it to protect himself may not. The disposition to defend is criminalised in advance of any act. The older architecture honoured the protector; the modern one prosecutes him — and now disarms him before the fact.

There is a further sex-asymmetry in which mechanism each sex's social world runs on, and it compounds the effect. Female social regulation has leaned historically on shame — the prostitute was shamed far more than the chaste woman was honoured — while male regulation leaned on honour: the competent and the brave were honoured, the incompetent and the cowardly shamed, but less totally than women. A society that feminises its social regulation should therefore be predicted to erase honour and amplify shame — a precise description of cancel culture, a pure punishment architecture with no answering elevation for contribution. Because men depended on the honour half, its removal falls on them asymmetrically.

#### **4e. The Self-Reinforcing Mechanism: Why the Fracture Intensifies**

The arguments above explain why each cohort fractures along the lines it does. They do not, on their own, explain the most important feature of the empirical record: the fracture is not stabilising at a steady state. It is intensifying, cohort by cohort, with each new cohort showing higher clinical burden, earlier onset, and sharper political-identification signatures than the last. A theory that treats each cohort's condition as the product of its own development cannot account for an acceleration. The conformity pathway can, and it is the structural core of this section.

*The Threshold* establishes that maturation can complete through either of two pathways — the direct responsibility-trigger, or a conformity pathway by which the maturing individual calibrates toward the surrounding adult population. The conformity pathway is a normal feature of the developmental architecture; its function is to transmit a working adult template across generations. Its failure mode is the mechanism here. When the surrounding adult population a cohort encounters is *itself* exhibiting the expression-features-on-a-dismantled-substrate pattern — the depressive, incomplete register this paper has been describing — the conformity pathway routes the maturing cohort toward that pattern. The cohort arrives at adulthood already partly conformed to the disorder, before its own substrate dismantling has even completed.

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*Each cohort matures in an environment more saturated with the preceding cohort's disorder than the one before it encountered. The conformity target shifts further toward the pattern with every generation. The fracture deepens not as an unexplained acceleration but as a structural consequence of a transmission mechanism feeding on its own output.*

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This is the self-reinforcing loop, and it carries a prediction that distinguishes it sharply from rival accounts (developed in the predictions below): the signatures should intensify across cohorts and accelerate as the saturated proportion of the adult environment grows, rather than stabilising or improving as time passes since the framework's establishment. The data — depression incidence rising faster in Gen Z than in Millennials at the same age, political-identification signatures sharpening across the same window — is consistent with the loop and inconsistent with any steady-state account. It is also exactly what J.D. Unwin's three-generation dynamic predicts: the consequences of a shift in foundational sexual and familial behaviour express not at once but across the succeeding generations, each inheriting and amplifying the last.

The smartphone enters precisely here, and its role is to be stated with care, because the obvious objection is that the smartphone is the cause and this paper's structural machinery is unnecessary. It is not the cause; it is the accelerant, and the distinction is exact. What the smartphone changes is *who sets the conformity target*. For most of human history the target was the local adult population — bounded, slow-moving, and at least partly composed of triggered, completed adults. The algorithmic feed replaces that bounded local target with an unbounded, curated, engagement-optimised one, saturating the cohort's environment with the disordered register faster and more pervasively than any local population could, and at every waking moment. A second difference compounds the first, and it concerns the topology of transmission rather than its speed. In every earlier instance the decay state was generated only where the structural cause operated — among those who had actually reached provision without struggle — and it spread from that secure stratum slowly, outward across geography and downward through the social hierarchy over generations, as the lower orders gradually imitated the disposition of the high. The social media feed dissolves both gradients. It takes the most advanced register the most insulated subpopulations have produced and delivers it to the whole cohort at once, before the recipient has reached anything resembling the security

that, in every prior case, was the precondition for acquiring the disposition at all. The structural cause still generates the state; the feed detaches its expression from the condition that produced it and broadcasts that expression universally — so that a register which once required arriving at the top of a society, and generations to diffuse downward, now arrives in full on the screen of an adolescent. The loop runs at a speed and intensity it could not reach without the technology. But it ran before the technology existed, which is the decisive point — and the historical record makes it unanswerable.

The historical comparators are not decorative, and their force depends on what they hold constant. The late-Roman senatorial elite, the Tang and Song gentry, and the Abbasid court elite share the one structural feature this paper isolates: each reached inherited material security in which the outcomes of status, provision, and protection were available without the action that had earned them — and each then exhibited the same cluster, withdrawal from competition and family formation, collapsing elite reproduction, and a turn toward aestheticism and novelty over inherited purpose, with no printing press, let alone an algorithm, in the causal chain. The comparison has real limits: these are elite subpopulations rather than whole societies, the records are partial and were not gathered to answer this question, and the reading is inferential. But that is why they discipline the smartphone claim: hold technology at zero and provision-without-struggle high, and the outcome still appears — which is what an accelerant-not-cause account predicts and a technology-as-cause account cannot accommodate.

#### **4f. The Methodological Protection**

If the suppression of analytical instinct during the developmental window is part of what produces the framework-seeking cohort, then exercising that instinct during the window is a specific protection against it — and the protection is symmetric. A cohort whose capacity for argument-evaluation, consistency-checking, and reality-tracking has been preserved through structured exposure to good reasoning is a cohort that recognises totalising frameworks, *of every political colour*, as structurally defective and routes around them. This is the single most important point the paper makes about prevention, and its value depends entirely on its symmetry: a reader trained in analytical method will detect the structural defects in arguments their own side endorses as readily as in their opponents'. The protection is methodological, not tribal — the opposite of matched-content ideological training — and its effectiveness is contingent on its remaining so. Section 6 takes this up as a distinct intervention category operating on a younger developmental window than the others.

## 5. The Blank Slate Objection

The argument to this point invites one objection above all others, and it must be disposed of directly, because the rest of the paper depends on the sex-differentiated repertoires being real rather than constructed. The objection is the blank-slate position: that sex-differentiated behaviour is primarily or entirely the product of social conditioning, such that removing the conditioning would dissolve the difference. This section does not present that position as one side of a live scientific debate, because it is not one. It identifies a position that the evidence has defeated, states precisely why, and explains why it nonetheless persists.

### 5a. The Position and Its Institutional Standing

The blank-slate account holds that the behavioural dispositions this paper treats as evolved are instead instilled — that the female orientation toward caregiving and the male orientation toward competition are taught, and could be untaught. It remains dominant in clinical-psychology training, social-work education, and the policy frameworks downstream of them. That dominance is real and consequential, and it is important to be clear about what kind of dominance it is. It is *institutional* consensus, and institutional consensus is not scientific consensus. (*Nothing Left to Conserve* documents how this institutional layer was captured; the *TDS Convergence Mechanism* specifies how a single ideological position propagates across nominally independent institutions until it presents as consensus.) On this question the two have come apart. The scientific literature in evolutionary biology, comparative psychology, and anthropology has accumulated overwhelming evidence against the blank slate; the institutional consensus in the clinical and policy fields has not followed, because it is not downstream of that literature. It is downstream of a political programme for which the blank slate is foundational.

### 5b. The Falsifying Evidence

The case against the position is not marginal or contested; it is a convergence of independent evidence categories, each individually difficult for the blank slate and jointly decisive. The gender-equality paradox is the sharpest: the position predicts convergence when social pressure is removed, and the most egalitarian societies show divergence. Cross-cultural consistency is the second: the dispositions appear across societies with radically different social organisations, including those with minimal Western influence, which they should not if social conditioning were the driver. The non-human primate evidence is the third, and the blank slate has no answer to it: sex-differentiated behaviour, including differentiated object and play preferences, appears in primates that cannot be ideologically conditioned. And Universe 25 is the fourth: sex-differentiated pathological expression — male withdrawal, female maternal collapse — under identical environmental conditions, in an organism with no social conditioning of any kind. A position that cannot accommodate the primate data and cannot accommodate the mouse data is not a theory facing anomalies. It is a theory that has been refuted and is being maintained.

### 5c. Why the Refuted Position Persists

That a defeated position retains institutional authority is itself a phenomenon requiring explanation, and the Madisonian diagnostic supplies it — not as an attack on the individuals who hold the position, but as a structural account of why it survives. The blank slate persists because it is *useful*. It is the theoretical foundation on which every sex-differentiated outcome can be read as evidence of discrimination requiring correction. Remove it, and the entire apparatus built to detect and correct such outcomes loses its justifying premise. The position is therefore defended not by its evidence, which is gone, but by the institutional interests that depend on it — exactly the configuration the Madisonian standard predicts will preserve a belief against disconfirmation: not virtue, not truth, but the alignment of the belief with the

self-interest of those positioned to enforce it. The stakes are larger than sex, which is why the defence is so total: concede that the sexes differ in evolved disposition and the door opens to the possibility that other groups differ too — and with it the collapse of the premise that every unequal outcome is proof of discrimination. The blank slate is load-bearing not for one progressive position but for the structure entire.

## 6. The Madisonian Structural Diagnosis and Policy Implications

### 6a. The Standard Response Treats the Symptom

The dominant response to the depression epidemic is pharmaceutical and therapeutic, and it is aimed at the individual — at brain chemistry and at cognition. What that response achieves at population scale is, on the evidence, genuinely uncertain, and three readings remain open:

1. It may be holding the line — that without it the rates would be worse still, which would imply a latent prevalence high enough to be its own indictment of the environment.
2. It may largely not work, in the way the blank slate “works”: persuasive on the individual case, invisible at the population level.
3. It may change the expression of depression as measured against clinical criteria without touching the underlying state — a symptom change, not a depression change.

The structural thesis need not choose between these; each, in its own way, points past the individual to the environment. The structural environment produces its effects through individual neurochemistry, and intervening at that level can reduce the symptom without touching the cause. The objection that antidepressants work, and that depression is therefore biochemical rather than structural, mistakes the level of analysis. The decisive evidence is at the population scale: prescription rates have risen continuously across the entire period of rising population depression, with no sign of the population-scale rate reduction that an individual-biochemical cause would produce under treatment. The pharmaceuticals are doing what they do. The structural condition is producing new patients faster than treatment clears the existing pool — or, on the third reading above, treatment is clearing the clinical signature while the depression it indexes persists unmeasured. The scale of the response is itself the diagnosis: when a substantial fraction of a population requires medication to function, the explanation is not millions of simultaneous individual failures. It is a structural environment generating pathology from normal organisms at scale. It is the zoo lion on antidepressants.

### 6b. The Structural Conditions

The conditions producing the outcomes are those this paper has traced throughout. On the female side: a cultural environment that installs career achievement as the exclusive source of female worth, devalues family formation as a life choice, and thereby closes the expression pathways of the primary female repertoire. On the male side: a cultural environment that designates the male repertoire pathological, removes the conditions that would require its expression through the universal provision of outcomes without struggle, and offers no legitimate alternative pathway. The removal is not only of conditions but of capacity: diversity programmes that ration access to education, advancement, and the visible markers of competence do not merely discourage male instinct-expression, they foreclose its means — while simultaneously pressing women toward the same masculine achievement frame, damaging both sexes at once. The irony is acute: the same culture in which a large majority of women say they want a more educated and successful husband is the one systematically withdrawing from the broad male population the opportunities that would let them become one. And beneath both: the general substitution of provided outcome for required action — resource for the hunt, safety for territory, validation markets for status earned through contribution. The cage is not a single policy. It is the cumulative configuration of an entire developed-world arrangement, which is why the diagnosis is structural and the corrective must be too.

One objection deserves a direct answer here, because it is the most reasonable one available to a critic: that this argument romanticises the pre-modern, treating its developmental conditions as a baseline to be restored. It does not, and the distinction between a baseline and a prescription is the whole of the reply. The argument identifies what the evolved machinery was built for and what the modern arrangement has done to it. It does not prescribe a return to pre-modern social organisation, and it argues against none of the genuine welfare gains — modern medicine, the collapse in infant mortality, the education of women, the safety net. The corrective is to preserve the developmental and instinct-expression conditions *within* the modern framework, not to abandon the framework. This is the same Madisonian-standard position the rest of the series takes: keep the gains, repair the structure that the gains were allowed to dismantle as a side effect. *Thus Spake Ilos* makes the comparative case decisive: cultures with wildly divergent religions and social forms nonetheless converged, universally and across all of recorded history, on differentiated sex roles tracking the very instincts this paper identifies. Every society that has existed organised around the proposition that the sexes differ in disposition and vocation — except ours, and only for the last fifteen to twenty years. What needs explaining is not the historical pattern but our brief departure from it.

## 6c. The Structural Solutions

The governing principle is the one that resolved captive-animal depression: environmental enrichment. The intervention that works is not the provision of more outcomes but the restoration of the conditions under which the evolved repertoire must be *expressed* to obtain them. Applied to human policy, this does not mean making life harder. It means ceasing to remove the conditions that make instinct expression both possible and necessary. The detailed policy programme is developed in *The Invisible Path*; this paper specifies the diagnosis the programme answers to, and names the categories the intervention architecture must include.

The diagnosis also suggests a clean natural experiment in which the policy lever and the falsification test are the same object. Hold the resource transfer constant — keep paying the entitlement — but attach to it a requirement of genuine, productive activity (the 'work-for-the-dole' family of schemes). If mental-health outcomes improve under the work requirement while income is unchanged, the protective ingredient was the required action, not the resource — exactly as the instinct-expression account predicts. The direct evidence is thin, since workfare has rarely been evaluated on mental health, but what exists points the right way: unemployment is among the most robust correlates of depression independent of income, and active-labour programmes that restore structured contribution improve wellbeing. It is the test worth commissioning.

Five intervention categories follow from the diagnosis, each operating on a different mechanism and a different population, and each complementary rather than alternative to the others.

1. *Madisonian incentive design* operates on the existing adult population through the incentive structure that shapes family-formation and life-course decisions.
2. *Developmental restoration* operates on the eighteen-to-twenty-two cohort by restoring access to the maturation trigger.
3. *Code practice* operates on the existing adult population through behavioural framework — practice without required metaphysical commitment, as established in the earlier papers.
4. *Cognitive-instinct preservation* operates on the eleven-to-eighteen cohort, before the suppression window, through structured exposure to analytical method; a Prothean children's series is the exemplar, and its value, as Section 4 argued, depends on its being methodological rather than tribal.

5. *Conformity-target restoration* operates on the cohort-environment composition itself — the surrounding adult population whose register sets the conformity target for the maturing cohort. This fifth category is structurally distinct because it targets a population layer rather than a developmental window, and it is the one the self-reinforcing mechanism makes indispensable: any intervention that does not address the conformity-target composition will be routed around by the loop and defeated. Its instruments are developed in *The Invisible Path*.

A final structural point bears on whether any of this is achievable, and it is the point at which the conservative instinct most often defeats itself. The reservation against state participation in cultural production — the worry that any such programme is an overreach — assumes an institutional environment of neutral cultural production into which the state would be intruding. That environment does not exist. As *Nothing Left to Conserve* establishes, the cultural-production layer of the developed economies was comprehensively captured by progressive institutional actors over the period from 1960 to 2020, through formal and informal mechanisms alike. The interventions proposed here do not introduce direction into a neutral system. They adjust the direction of a mechanism that is already operating, already directed, and already shaping the conformity environment that this paper has identified as the engine of the fracture. The choice is not between a directed cultural apparatus and a neutral one. It is between a directed apparatus that is acknowledged and structurally accountable and one that is neither.

The toxic-masculinity narrative is named, finally, as a policy target in its own right and not a cultural preference to be managed through sensitivity training. A narrative that closes the male instinct-expression pathways and thereby produces the radicalisation and withdrawal it claims to prevent is a structural condition with measurable population-scale costs. It belongs in the diagnosis as a cause, and in the policy programme as something to be structurally corrected, not negotiated with.

## Appendix: Falsifiable Predictions

The thesis is advanced under the evidential standard set out in the Methodology Note: a novel structural theory earns assent through the absence of falsifying evidence and the presence of consistent evidence across independent streams. The predictions below are the agenda on which the theory can be broken. Each states the observation that would falsify it.

1. **Depression and abundance.** Depression rates are highest in populations with the lowest trigger-exposure — latest family-formation age, most universalised education-to-employment pipeline, most extensive provision of outcomes without struggle. *Falsified by: rates flat across populations of widely differing trigger-exposure, or highest under scarcity.* Status: consistent.

2. **Sex-differentiated signatures.** The two suppression vectors produce two clinical signatures — female internalising and over-counted by calibrated instruments, male externalising and under-counted. *Falsified by: identical signatures across sexes.* Status: consistent.

3. **Partisan differential.** Political-identification depression differentials track demographic-specific suppression; sharpest among young progressive women; widening with suppression. *Falsified by: convergence across identification, or inversion, once confounds are controlled.* Status: consistent.

4. **Trigger-preserving communities.** Communities preserving the trigger conditions show measurably lower depression than matched modern-framework populations. *Falsified by: equivalent or higher rates in trigger-preserving communities.* Status: consistent.

5. **The Universe 25 pattern in humans.** The highest-provision economies show the most advanced withdrawal pattern — NEET, hikikomori, herbivore men, voluntary celibacy. *Falsified by: high-provision economies showing no elevation relative to low-provision ones.* Status: Japan is the most advanced known case.

6. **Shame–honour asymmetry.** High-shame, low-honour enforcement environments produce clinical signatures distinct from those of low-shame, high-honour environments, independent of absolute shame intensity. *Falsified by: identical signatures regardless of asymmetry direction.* Status: preliminary evidence consistent.

7. **Minimal-cue activation.** Evolved instincts activate on minimal, schematic cues when the underlying architecture is intact, before the evolved-target context obtains — female caregiving instinct firing on digital and substitute targets, with lower-intensity male engagement. *Falsified by: no measurable activation on minimal-cue substitutes, or activation only after substantial conditioning.* Status: consistent with the Tamagotchi natural experiment.

8. **Across-cohort intensification.** The depression and political-radicalisation signatures intensify cohort by cohort rather than stabilising, with the rate accelerating as the saturated share of the surrounding adult environment grows. *Falsified by: signatures stabilising at steady-state, or improving as time passes since the framework's establishment.* Status: consistent with Gen Z–Millennial trajectory data; deserves systematic cohort-comparison analysis.

**Three inverse tests**, each of which would weaken the structural thesis and none of which the record supports: sustained population-scale depression reduction attributable to pharmaceutical intervention; trigger-preserving subpopulations showing equivalent or higher depression than income- and education-matched pipeline subpopulations; and the disappearance of sex differences in clinical depression in the most egalitarian societies. The empirical record runs the other way on all three.

**A discriminating prediction — and what would actually test it.** Because this paper's mechanism (continuous instinct-expression) is co-ordinate with, not reducible to, the developmental-gate mechanism of *The Threshold*, the two should be separable: holding maturation status constant, populations deprived of instinct-expression should show elevated pathology relative to matched populations that retain it. The cleanest version holds the never-triggered, childless-past-the-window cohort constant and varies the instinct-expression environment; this paper predicts the low-expression group worse despite identical maturational status. This prediction has not yet been tested by a valid measure — and, on the standard this paper holds to, that is not a mark against it: the test that matters is whether evidence *contradicts* the pathway, and none does. The obvious proxies — retirement, the empty nest — do not test it and cannot falsify it, because retirees and empty-nesters have *completed* the family instinct and typically retain or reopen expression pathways; they are not instinct-suppressed in the sense the thesis requires, so the absence of elevated pathology among them (retirement is even associated meta-analytically with *reduced* depression) is consistent with the thesis, not against it. The prediction awaits the matched-maturation design named above — the test that could actually falsify it.

**Smartphones are not the cause**, and the falsification is historical. Late Roman elites, Tang and Song gentry, and the Abbasid-era elite reached structurally identical terminal states — withdrawal, collapsing reproduction, the disintegration of inherited purpose — with no industrial technology and no mass media of any kind. The structural conditions that produce these outcomes are deeper than any contemporary technology. Smartphones accelerate the conformity-target inversion; they do not originate it.

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