

Psychologist: College Students Today 'Less Resilient'

"If you can keep your head when all about you

Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,

If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,

But make allowance for their doubting too;

If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,

Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,

Or being hated, don't give way to hating..."

So begins Rudyard Kipling's famous poem ["If-"](#), which throughout extols [the virtue of courage](#), characterizing it as remaining steadfast in the face of life's trials and setbacks.

But if these are the marks of courage, then that virtue is apparently becoming rarer in today's college students.

At least, that's what psychologist Denise Cummins seems to imply in the title of her PBS column, ["What's making students 'less resilient'?"](#)

The column begins:

"Something very disturbing is happening on college campuses. [A 2014 survey by the American College Health Association found that](#) 94 percent of counseling center directors reported a steady increase in the number of college students with severe psychological problems, and 89 percent reported an increase in the number of students arriving on campus who

were already taking prescription medication for anxiety or depression.

Coupled with an increase in diagnosable psychiatric disorders is a reported decline in average student resilience—the ability to manage and bounce back from the bumps of everyday life.”

Referring to [Dr. Peter Gray's post](#) last year in Psychology Today, the column also notes that “students are increasingly having emotional crises over problems of everyday life, such as a conflicts with roommates or receiving bad grades.”

So what's the reason for this declined resiliency among college students?

The column cites several possibilities: helicopter parenting, an overly regimented K-12 system, the perception that the academic and economic world is more competitive and less forgiving than in the recent past. Cummins eventually concludes in favor of this last possibility, believing the perception that today's world is harsher is in fact a reality.

I tend to disagree with Dr. Cummins. If you know even a tiny bit about 20th-century history, you know that previous generations also had plenty of stressful situations to deal with. We're not unique in that regard.

[Classic philosophy](#) saw anxiety as rooted in locating one's happiness in things beyond one's control. If students (or their parents) are placing their hopes for happiness on good grades, admittance to certain schools, and upward social mobility, and believe that through their maneuvering they can *guarantee* these outcomes—well, that's a recipe for increased anxiety.

If we are seeing greater levels of anxiety today among students, it's probably more attributable to a widespread

spiritual sickness in American society than merely changed external circumstances.