

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/there-is-a-mental-health-crisis-on-campus-11568157092>

OPINION | FUTURE VIEW

## *There Is a Mental-Health Crisis on Campus*

What's causing it? Where did it come from? Students discuss.

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Sept. 10, 2019 7:11 pm ET



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/EYEEM

*Editor's note: This Future View is about the sharp increase in depression, anxiety and suicidal thinking reported by college students over the last decade. Next week we'll ask, "How do you view the rise of vaping and e-cigarettes? How should the law view it?" Students should click [here](#) to submit opinions of fewer than 250 words before Sept. 17. The best responses will be published that night.*

Life Through a Lens

Technology has in many ways made life easy—certainly much easier than before. So why did one recent study find that the rate of moderate to severe depression among U.S. college students rose from 23.2% in 2007 to 41.1% in 2018, while rates of moderate to severe anxiety jumped from 17.9% in 2013 to 34.4% in 2018? I think technology itself may be to blame for the rise.

My generation grew up around smartphones. We are accustomed to receiving instant gratification. By pressing a few buttons we can have meals delivered to our homes; receive step-by-step directions to our destinations; and even find people to date. This ability to satisfy our wants and needs instantly has created a tendency in many of us to panic when faced with real problems. We often lack the ability to grind through adversity, as we've come to expect quick and easy solutions. When things don't go smoothly right away, they can seem hopeless.

Social media provides a filtered view of our friends and peers—the good shines through while the bad stays hidden. This can make us feel as if everyone is happier than we are, as if we're the only ones with problems, and as if our problems can't be solved. That's a recipe for stress, anxiety and depression.

We also compare our lives constantly with only the best of others' lives. Social media provides a filtered view of our friends and peers—the good shines through while the bad stays hidden. This can make us feel as if everyone is happier than we are, as if we're the only ones with problems, and as if our problems can't be solved. That's a recipe for stress, anxiety and depression.

— *Alexander Brent, University of Tennessee, law*

Ready as I'll Never Be

The typical college student arrives on campus after 18 years of being scheduled and micromanaged by parents. College preparation begins at least at age 5, when kids can be shuttled from activity to activity—apparently that's what “successful parents” must do. This intensity doesn't let up. In fact, it becomes a form of competition earlier than most realize. Guided by their parents, students race to assemble a record of extravagant extracurricular participation and impressive test scores. Perhaps most important are the “unique” accomplishments that can “set you apart” from the crowd, even though the crowd is chasing uniqueness as hard as you are. It need not ever be said aloud that one's performance in accumulating achievements and involvements is the relevant barometer of success, the one that matters.

That's enough to make anyone feel depressed and anxious. Scratch that. It was enough to make me and others I know depressed and anxious and worse.

— *Elizabeth Hildebrandt, University of Toledo, political science*

### Unhealthy Competition

Attention is the basic commodity of social media. One gives and receives it in the form of likes, shares, subscribers and up-votes. This is inherently competitive and comparative: If you receive more than me, you have higher status.

Healthy competition has rules, written or unwritten, to regulate behavior and establish a baseline of civility and dignity for the participants. Think of most sports. Sadly, competition on social media is anything but healthy. Social-media users can say or do almost anything to get ahead. They often use aggressive tactics such as publicly shaming a rival, or even a bystander, for the approval of the crowd. Seeking that same approval, others will go to the opposite extreme by revealing deeply personal information about themselves, or sharing provocative photos. In this type of competition, normal and healthy behavior falls flat because it doesn't draw as much attention as unhealthy, mean or narcissistic behavior. Guess which type social-media users are encouraged to exhibit?

Social media is a game that hooks us with a constant stream of information but allows us to undermine our own dignity through constant comparison of lives and ruthless competition for attention.

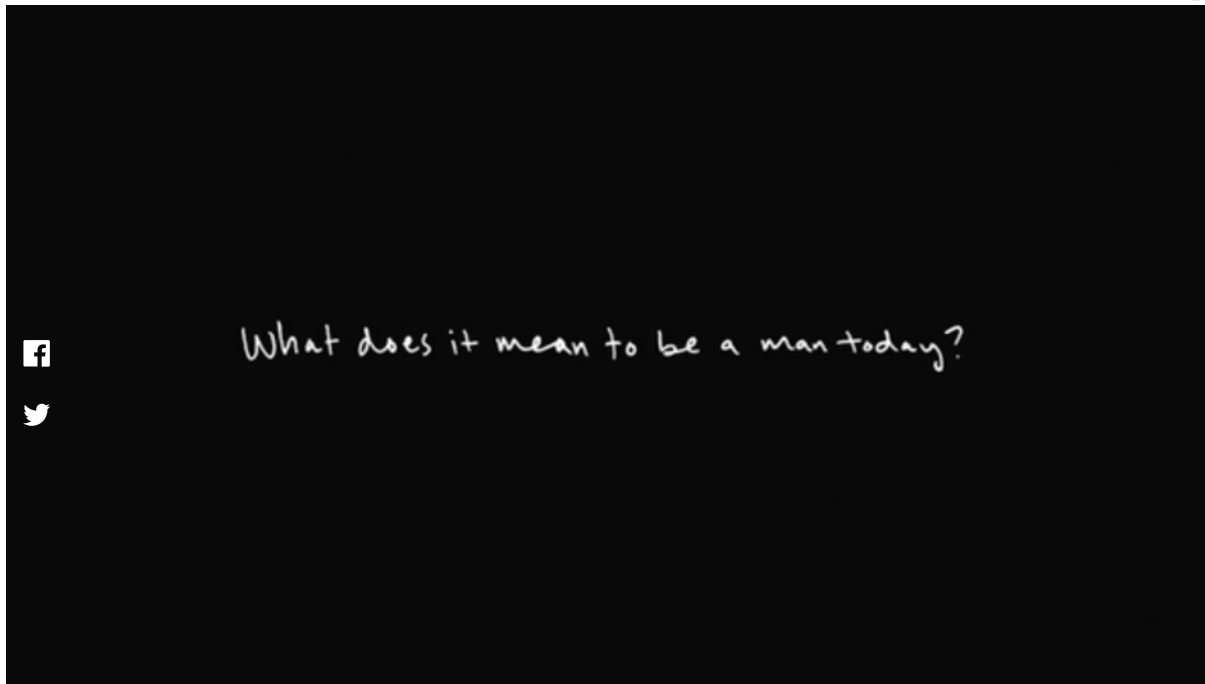
— *Matthew Downey, Loyola University Chicago, accounting, economics and finance*

### Under Pressure

A college degree no longer guarantees the economic security it once did, though the price of college has skyrocketed. Start there to understand the emotional turmoil many students are facing.

College is so expensive that students feel as if they have to be perfect. Otherwise, they might think they're failing themselves and their families, who have invested so much in them and their futures. Students feel tremendous pressure to earn high grade-point averages, but they also take on extensive extracurricular responsibilities and chase the enviable social life that the "college experience" is supposed to promise.

— ADVERTISEMENT —



Students today do everything they can to make the sacrifices of paying tuition seem worthwhile, but the uncertainty of the investment and the debt they are piling up loom over everything. The stress can be debilitating, especially after something starts to go wrong—a bad grade, a breakup, or the simple realization that time is running out on your college years. Maybe it's not healthy for the stakes to feel so high.

— *Emily Kaib, Vanderbilt University, economics and public policy*

[Click here to submit a response to the next Future View.](#)

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