



Yale Professor: “Don’t Send Your Kid to the Ivy League”

William Deresiewicz, who spent 10 years on the faculty of Yale University, including a day on the Yale admissions committee, has become disillusioned and somewhat cynical about the whole process smart kids must go through to get into one of the prestigious institutions, such as Harvard, Stanford, or Williams. He also includes in the process the elite high schools, private tutors, and test prep courses that upper middle-class parents force their bright kids to go through to get to the top. The professor writes in the *New Republic* of 8/4/14:



These enviable youngsters appear to be the winners in the race we have made of childhood. But the reality is very different.... Our system of elite education manufactures young people who are smart and talented and driven, yes, but also anxious, timid, and lost, with little intellectual curiosity and a stunted sense of purpose: trapped in a bubble of prestige, heading meekly in the same direction, great at what they are doing but with no idea why they’re doing it.

That’s quite an indictment of a system we are all supposed to envy. But apparently there is less to envy than we’ve been conditioned to believe. The well-endowed top universities, with their celebrity professors who spend more time writing books than teaching, have come to represent the essence of success for the middle-class social climber who dares not fail in anything academic. The admission standards have become so onerous that getting into one of these schools is like winning the lottery. Yet, the professor writes:

Look beneath the façade of seamless well-adjustment, and what you often find are toxic levels of fear, anxiety, and depression, of emptiness and aimlessness and isolation.... One student told me that a friend of hers had left Yale because she found the school “stifling to the parts of yourself that you’d call a soul.”

These observations reveal something about these liberal elite graduates who then begin careers in government and finance and create the type of dysfunction that now characterizes what goes on in politically correct Washington and Wall Street. Power and wealth are the symbols of success, the endgame of that grueling educative process. As secular humanists they can work for Obama or any other liberal president with no qualms.

But the tragedy is that some of these bright driven kids rebel against the system that denies them the right to be themselves, and a few of them commit suicide. That happened in Fairfax, Virginia, in February 2014, where a 15-year-old high-achieving sophomore at Woodson High School killed himself because he “couldn’t keep doing this.” He wrote in a suicide note: “There is too much stress in my life from school and the environment it creates, expectations for sports, expectations from my friends and expectations from my family.” In other words he could not be himself and experience an occasional failure without disappointing everyone around him. What he really needed was a year off from school so that he could experience true inner freedom and the pursuit of satisfying interests.



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on October 17, 2014

Unfortunately, many middle-class parents think that they are preparing their youngsters for successful futures by expecting nothing but academic perfection in their middle- and high-school years. Fathers want their sons to excel at school sports, and sons want to please their parents. Some sons are natural athletes who enjoy sports. But losing a game can be traumatic.

There have been six suicides at Woodson High School during the last three years. To the parents it's all very baffling. These kids did not seem to be at risk. They had good grades, came from loving families, were excellent in sports. If it were not for the note left by one of the suicides, we wouldn't have a clue. It seems that the endless pressure to excel simply takes the joy out of growing up. And as the Yale professor observes, even after they've achieved the greatest success of all — acceptance by an Ivy League university — there is still no joy, for the pressure to excel remains greater than ever.

Fairfax, Virginia, is not the only town plagued by teen suicides. Newton, Massachusetts, a leafy upscale suburb of Boston, has had its own tragedies. In February 2014, Roe Grutman, a 17-year-old junior at Newton South High School, took his life shortly before he was to take five tests in advanced placement and honors classes. Driven by the absolute need to succeed, he just quit. He became the third high schooler to kill himself that academic year.

Roe had scored a perfect 800 on the math portion of his SATs. His mother says in retrospect: "I really didn't know that it was not OK to take five AP and honors classes. I blame myself for that, for not being on top of things."

Boston Globe reporter Kathleen Burge revealed that Roe also knew Katie Stack, the second Newton teen who killed herself in October 2013. She lived in the same neighborhood and also attended South.

A story in the *Globe* related: "Katie Stack had just joined a marathon running club, following in the footsteps of her older sister. She loved gymnastics and was forever practicing her splits in her Newton backyard. She was a natural at math, had a soft spot for children, and dreamed of one day becoming a pediatric oncologist."

The day after she died, Roe called his mother from the school nurse's office at 8:45. Could she pick him up? They ate breakfast together and talked. Roe kept puzzling over Katie's death. "He just couldn't figure out why she did it," his mother said. "Why would she do such a thing?"

Yet, only five months later, Roe killed himself. Why would he do such a thing?

Professor Deresiewicz is not sure what can be done to change the system. He writes:

I used to think that we needed to create a world where every child had an equal chance to get to the Ivy League. I've come to see that what we really need is to create one where you don't have to go to the Ivy League, or any private college, to get a first-rate education.... The best option of all may be the second-tier — not second-rate — colleges, like Reed, Kenyon, Wesleyan, Sewanee, Mount Holyoke.

All of those colleges are liberal, secular humanist institutions and likely to continue students on a path toward self-disillusionment. The professor seems to have never heard of homeschooling or Patrick Henry College, where the Bible is the Common Core of the curriculum.

He forgot, too, that true education begins after a student has left the academy. One of the reasons why the so-called greatest generation became the greatest generation is because they spent several years fighting a war. Those who survived learned unforgettable lessons.



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