

# Is 21st Century society too sensitive?

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## **Introduction**

With each passing year since the turn of the century, people have gained a heightened susceptibility to influence from outside factors. The Cambridge online dictionary defines the word ‘sensitive’ as, “...easily influenced, changed, or damaged, esp. by a physical activity or effect...” and the word ‘society’ as “people considered as a group, or a group of people who live together in a particular social system...” (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2017).

People have gotten sicker, more depressed, and overly sensitive to others’ actions. Unfortunately, I am all too familiar with this fact—many of my friends and I suffer from both mental and physical illnesses; one has had cancer, many are depressed, and several are easily-offended.

There is another side to this, however. Our medical problems may not have any relation to the turn of the century—it could be that we’re just being more commonly misdiagnosed, or that our mental health problems are not yet fully understood. Maybe these problems aren’t new, but we now have the ability to detect them. Maybe the cultural issues we’re having are not simply grounded in vulnerability, but can be reasonable.

I plan to answer this question by addressing three scopes of it: mental, physical, and cultural health. I’m using a variety of sources, including research articles, books, and even blogs. Others might approach this question in a more scientific manner, but the reason I’m using sources such as blogs in my research is for a perspective of real society and of average people, not of only educated researchers with secondhand information. Personally, I hope this paper helps to create greater societal awareness, and that I can effectively discuss such a broad topic in a way that makes it easy to understand.

### *Cultural Health*

#### Perceived Discrimination

The first aspect of cultural health in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that must be discussed is the issue of perceived discrimination. Today, discrimination has an entirely different meaning than it did in years past. Sexism was once virtually unrecognized, and racism used to be based upon serious offense (ie: being denied a job based on one’s skin color). Now, anything from small hand gestures to simple questions can be easily misconstrued.

This concept is known as ‘microaggressions,’ which are...“the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership,” (Rivera, D. P. and Sue, W. D., 2017).

This concept of ‘microaggressions’ essentially means that many of the things we do and say on a regular basis can be perceived as offensive. In this day-in-age, that shouldn’t be taken lightly. This recent idea is only growing in popularity, and it’s only created a justification for those who are too easily offended.

An example of this perceived but unintended prejudice comes to us in the form of a Floridian teacher being fired over an assignment that was intended to spread cultural awareness to her students. According to Daily News, (specifically the New York Daily News),

The supplemental assignment given to students at Fox Chapel Middle school titled, ‘How Comfortable am I?’ was designed with the intention of shining a light on biases and helping the kids accept those that are different than them, WPTV reported, (Daily News, 2017).

The Daily News was founded in 1919 and is still one of America’s most highly-circulated daily newspapers, however the paper’s focus and its writers’ motivation to write for the purpose of gaining attention could definitely affect the reliability of its articles. The assignment discussed here was considered to be offensive due to the subject matter it contained referring to how different people may view people of other colors, genders, or walks of life. Personally, I see this as just as bad as depriving school-age children of sexual education—it breeds ignorance. This article calls into question how exactly we’re going to foster the value of acceptance within the children of this era if we cannot trust our educators to do it.

### Trigger Warnings/Safe Spaces

This leads me directly into my second point under the cultural umbrella—trigger warnings and safe spaces. A trigger warning is... “A statement at the start of a piece of writing, video, etc. alerting the reader or viewer to the fact that it contains potentially distressing material (often used to introduce a description of such content),” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017).

A safe space is, “a place (as on a college campus) intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations,” (Merriam Webster, 2017).

Trigger warnings and safe spaces are becoming increasingly common across college campuses, and are directly impacting professors’ ability to effectively teach. According to Frank Furedi, a writer for British newspaper The Guardian,

Students studying the archaeology of modern conflict at University College, London, have been told they are permitted to leave class if they find the discussion of historical events ‘disturbing’ or traumatizing, (Furedi, F., 2017).

Frank Furedi is a professor of sociology at the University of Kent and has written many books about sociology, especially focusing on today’s cultural problems. However, he is very defensive of other teachers, which could cause some possible sway in his argument. The point he

makes with this example is something I find to be both ironic and scary. Why should those who are studying conflict be given permission to avoid confronting it? We cannot keep coddling the minds of this generation's thinkers and future workers—when they leave college and enter the real world, they won't know what's hit them; and unfortunately, it only gets worse.

This exact coddling of the mind may also cause major mental problems later in life.

The expansive use of trigger warnings may also foster unhealthy mental habits in the vastly larger group of students who do not suffer from PTSD or other anxiety disorders. People acquire their fears not just from their own past experiences, but from social learning as well. If everyone around you acts as though something is dangerous...then you are at risk of acquiring that fear too, (Lukianoff, G., and Haidt, J., 2017).

This comes from Greg Lukianoff, the president and CEO of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, and Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist at New York University and director of Heterodox Academy. However their educational backgrounds may cause some level of sway in their opinion of education-related subjects such as this. They bring to light an important subject that remains largely unconsidered—the mental harm that hiding potentially-harmful subjects may cause. This is another reason not to shelter our minds from material that may be disturbing. Exposure to subjects that have caused previous trauma is one of the best ways to move past that trauma.

In this generation, trigger warnings almost seem counterintuitive anyway. Cursing has become household vernacular, movies and games aren't afraid to show graphic violence or nudity, and shootings have become an almost-weekly occurrence. As Jack Halberstam asks, "So, in a media landscape dotted with warnings about explicit lyrics, violent imagery, raunchy humor, and nudity, what makes a trigger warning inflammatory?" Jack Halberstam teaches American Studies and Ethnicity, Gender Studies, and Comparative Literature, and directs of The Center for Feminist Research at University of Southern California; his traditionally-liberal stance on many subjects may, however, reduce his ability to write in a neutral manner. This question raises a series of other questions. Honestly, I find myself asking: isn't this a little absurd? Would something like trigger warnings, safe-spaces, and other such things have even been possible several decades ago? The 21<sup>st</sup> century has definitely changed a lot about the way we view ourselves and others, the way we communicate, and the material we view. Policies such as this have culminated a culture of fear. We are allowing ourselves to avoid things that may potentially be distressing rather than facing them and growing up enough to be able to confront these topics with ease.

### The Ongoing Relevance of Prejudice

Although trigger warnings, safe spaces, and microaggressions are virtually unnecessary commonalities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they may be backed up by real, visible prejudice. Although my previous arguments may suggest a lack of modern-day prejudice, this is assuredly not the case. A

good example of this comes from the New York Daily News, based on an event in a New Jersey school.

The uproar began Friday when...an unidentified teacher [told] a student in a class of seniors and juniors that U.S. soldiers ‘are not fighting for your right to speak Spanish.’...‘They are fighting for your right to speak American,’ she said, presumably meaning the English language, (Gunderman, D., & Hensley, N., 2017).

Dan Gunderman and Nicole Hensley are digital content producers for the New York Daily News, and both write for the entertainment and political columns. Their experience in the field of political matters would seem advantageous; however they are being paid to write the content they produce, so it is possible they have been instructed to publish altered information. This blatant and jarring example of racial discrimination in the modern day supports the idea that, although we have evolved into a more accepting society, there are still many who refuse to assimilate. This fact contrasts the idea that our culture is simply overly-sensitive, and insinuates that there is actual prejudice, or evidence of prejudice, involved in our daily lives.

Unfortunately, it does not get better from there. In recent years, many self-proclaimed “religious activists” have taken it upon themselves to use violence against violence. Several of these people are discussed in the book *Religious Violence and Abortion: The Gideon Project*. “The bombing of three abortion clinics in Pensacola early on Christmas morning, 1984, called by the perpetrators ‘a birthday gift for Jesus,’ dramatized the lengths to which the anti-abortion movement would go to stop what they call ‘genocide,’” (Blanchard, D. A., & Prewitt, T. J., 1993). This tragedy from the mid 1980’s opened the eyes of many to a ‘movement’ that is, unfortunately, still happening. Dallas Blanchard and Terry Prewitt are both associate professors of anthropology at the University of West Florida, Blanchard also being a professor of sociology. Their knowledge of society and Prewitt’s work with the Methodist Church enforce their ability to talk about the subject. However, their religious background may cause them to have certain predispositions. Just as many African Americans throughout history have been mistreated due to the color of their skin, something they did not choose to be born with, the mothers of these unborn children did not decide to become pregnant. It is often a very difficult decision to abort a child. Many times, these women are victims of rape, poverty, or other circumstances under which it would be considered cruel to raise a child. Those abortion clinic bombers are an awful example of discrimination at work.

However, this painfully-ironic gesture of hatred is unfortunately not unaccompanied. The continuity of this type of act is shown in some statistics recovered by Jessica Glenza of The Guardian.

Abortion providers have experienced an average of 1.3 fires per year for the last 10 years...Five arsons were committed in 2012, the most in one year since 2004. No arsons

were reported in 2013, and there was one in 2014...In 2012, NAF confirmed five arsons that targeted abortion providers, and there have been 58 since 1995, (Glenza, J., 2017).

Jessica Glenza is a health reporter for the Guardian (US edition) and has written many articles about modern health and politics. However, her writing may be biased liberally due to the liberal nature of the Guardian's publications. The events described in the 1980's warranted an entire book, whereas today, this type of appalling action is plastered all over the papers. It has gotten far from better, and the evidence of that is shown in the fear many of us feel when speaking about subjects that are considered taboo. There is clearly a kind of real, tangible violence and danger beyond all of the microaggressions and triggers.

### Education (Banned Books & Sex Ed)

The issue of real oversensitivity, however, seems to have reared its head in places that are traditionally considered safe: books. Many books that were once called classics and some that were even a core part of school curriculum are now banned in places like the United States. Laws have been implemented to keep these books off of the shelves based on their content, but oftentimes, the reasoning behind the bans is ludicrous. According to the American Library Association,

A challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group. A banning is the removal of those materials. Challenges do not simply involve a person expressing a point of view; rather, they are an attempt to remove material from the curriculum or library, thereby restricting the access of others, (ALA, 2017).

The ALA is a nonprofit educational organization with over 62,000 members, making it the largest library association in the world; however its judgments may be swayed by libraries' economic reliance upon books. Whether it be a challenge or a ban, the idea behind either one seems to be misguided a majority of the time. For example,

The most commonly censored topics in literature for young adults tend to relate to sexuality and offensive language, with the argument that literature that includes sexually explicit scenes, LGBTQ characters, and language that is deemed offensive is inappropriate for the age of the intended audience. This stance largely underestimates or ignores that many young people identify as LGBTQ, are sexually active, and often curse in their daily lives, and that literature simply reflects these realities, (Blasingame, J. and Durand, S., 2017).

This source comes from Arizona State University and its English professors, James Blasingame, who teaches at ASU's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and is executive director and former president of the NCTE's Assembly on Literature for Adolescents, and Sybil Durand, who is an assistant professor at the same school. She teaches young adult literature and methods

of teaching; however, their English-teaching background could place their favor in the hands of literature. Blasingame and Durand bring to light a major problem with today's censorship—it isn't based on today's values. I am ashamed to live in a country where we censor common and generally well-accepted values. "Since 1982, more than 11,000 books have been challenged by schools, public libraries and bookstores..." (Blasingame, J. and Durand, S., 2017). At the rate we're going, we're going to lose all traces of even slightly conflicting literature, a lot of which is considered classical, and much of which is the backbone of our educational material and intellectual conflicts that require thought. Conflicting material often has the most potential to teach; if we remove it from our curriculum, what are we learning?

A similar concept applies to the flawed and sometimes downright incorrect mess that we refer to as "sexual education." According to Tom Rademacher,

There are no federal regulations about what should be taught in sex-ed, so each state gets to make its own choices. Currently only 13 states require sex education to be medically accurate, (Rademacher, T., 2017).

Tom Rademacher is a middle school language arts teacher who is married to a sex psychologist. He has been nominated "Teacher of the Year" in his state, and written at least one book. However, his educational standpoint could sway his judgment in favor of the students or his job. This statistic is frightening; it means less than a fourth of the entire United States is required to provide medically accurate information regarding sex to its students. Everywhere else is open to anything from religion to local ideals. Society has become so unbelievably thin-skinned that we can't even teach this generation's children about sex, which is something they need to understand for their own safety. "If we're preparing our young people to be adults...then they're ready to read about adult subjects," (ALA, 2017).

Unfortunately, it only gets worse from there. Some parents directly withdraw their children from school to avoid this type of education completely. Based on a Canadian case study done by Sobia Ali-Faisal,

In the new school year nearly 700 hundred children were kept out of Thorncliffe Park Public School (almost half their population) on the first day of school and their parents have vowed to keep their children out of school until the new sex-ed curriculum is changed, (Ali-Faisal, S., 2017).

Ali-Faisal is holds a PhD in Applied Social Psychology and focuses on sexual guilt and sexual anxiety of Muslims in Canada and the US. She has studied ethnic identity and acculturation of South Asian Muslim Canadians as well. However, her self-proclaimed feminist approach to her work and Muslim background could heavily affect her judgment. This case study brings to attention the shocking numbers of children who are being withheld vital life information.

### Censorship is Selectively Necessary

However, as harmful as censorship often is, in certain cases, censorship can be a beneficial practice. Some advantages of censorship are discussed in a persuasive article by Jahor Azarkievič.

...censorship can be justified in terms of protecting society against extremism, alcohol and cigarette propaganda and false information that may question the credibility of the media... examples of positive censorship, such as protection of press from insufficient information as well as restriction of propaganda...[prove] that these measures serve as necessary, (Azarkievič, J., 2015).

Besides being used, in more extreme cases, to hide possibly-sensitive subjects from the general population, censorship may have some advantages. This only goes to show that maybe this epidemic of filtering isn't all bad, and that it isn't necessarily based upon oversensitivity.

Some more possible positive influences of censorship are listed on Vittana.org:

There are dark areas of the internet where anything goes right now. Access to illicit drugs, sex trafficking, human trafficking, and child pornography can be accessed with relative ease by those who seek out such things. By restricting content that can be accessed, it limits the opportunities that predators can create to reach out to find new victims, (Vittana.org, 2017).

Vittana.org is an NGO (non-governmental organization) that publishes information about poverty, finance, and other “big issues” concerning society. The NGO status of this website makes it a better candidate to speak about censorship due to the reduction of governmental bias; however, this source is unauthored, which raises questions about its validity. The ideas listed in this source are some of the same that are the subject of trigger warnings and similar social concepts; however, in this setting, there is a better reason to censor them. Although there are many reasons to say that modern censorship is just a major oversight, one can argue that it may have simply become as prominent as it is due to public reaction to the presence of prejudice and of negatively-influential topics, especially considering youth. Maybe what we need is regulation, not radical action, in both directions.

### *Physical Health*

#### Allergies/Asthma

Delving into the field of physical health, a good place to start would be with the steadily rising rates of allergies and asthma. According to the American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology,

A leading theory behind the rising allergy and asthma diagnosis rates is the ‘hygiene hypothesis.’ ...living conditions in much of the world might be too clean and that kids

aren't being exposed to germs that train their immune systems to tell the difference between harmless and harmful irritants, (AAAI, 2017).

This article was reviewed by Thanai Pongdee (MD) in 2017. He is a pediatrician, researcher, allergist, and internist for Mayo Clinic. However, his economic reliance upon medical work could cause him to misdiagnose in his favor. It is true that as we advance in technology and civil tendencies, we become cleaner every day. We have become religious about showering, vacuuming, washing, and scrubbing ourselves and our environment. However, it is a relatively new idea that it may actually be exacerbating the problem we're trying to remedy. Hygiene Hypothesis is one of many ideas about why exactly the rates of respiratory-related complications have arisen more frequently in recent years, especially regarding children. Obviously, if there is any truth to this theory, it is a problem mostly affecting MEDC's (more economically-developed countries). These are also, however, the places where the research is being done, so unfortunately there isn't much of a basis for comparison.

Another example comes from the National Library of Medicine, this time focused on asthma.

A recent report indicated that rates of death from Asthma in England and Wales increased by an average of almost 5% per year from 1974 to 1984 for those aged 5 to 34 years...The average annual increase in hospital admission rates was 21% between 1974 and 1983 for the youngest group (less than 5 years of age), (NCBI, 2017).

This source was co-written by six different professionals, all with varying medical degrees, who researched the increasing amount of deaths/illnesses due to asthma in Canada. This means it has been cross-referenced by professionals in different areas. However, the information in this source is slightly dated, which might influence its relevance. These numbers represent a clear trend: illness and death from asthma are becoming far more common, especially concerning youth. Because asthma and allergies are already fairly common among the general population, these statistics are rather frightening, and foretell a grim future. We are clearly becoming more susceptible to allergens and irritants.

### Other Physical Health Complications

In terms of other types of steadily deteriorating physical health, there are many conditions to be discussed. Some of the major would be diabetes, obesity, celiac, and various autoimmune diseases that seem to be becoming fairly normalized. According to Grace Rattue,

Between 2001 and 2009, the incidence of type 1 diabetes increased by 23%...Finland also showed a similar increase...The incidence of celiac disease, which causes the body's immune system to attack the small intestine, is also on the rise...In the United States, 1 in 133 people are affected by celiac disease, (Rattue, G., 2017).

Grace Rattue is a journalist for Medical News Today, and uses many scholarly sources for statistics within the article. However, Grace Rattue has no online reputation, so there is nothing to be said of her abilities or to accredit her level of knowledge on this subject. These statistics show a clear correlation between the year and the number of cases of diabetes and celiac, not just in the United States, but in Finland as well. Celiac disease and gluten allergies in general are something that virtually did not exist fifty years ago; some people still don't believe gluten intolerance is real. This on top of the statistics suggests that it is not something that's been around for long. Our immune systems and our bodies are becoming weaker.

### Big Pharma is Lying to Us

However, this could all be just a major misconception. Numbers are rising, but why? There are many researchers and emerging statistics that suggest Big Pharma, a collective name for big pharmaceutical providers, is spreading lies about increasing disease in order to sell more products. The idea is presented quite well here by Joachim Hagopian.

Plenty of empirical evidence exists that confirm concerted diabolical efforts have been made to ruin the lives of pioneering heroes who have come up with possible cures for cancer, AIDS and other terminal illnesses. Obviously their work poses a serious threat to medical status quo. Hence, their treatments have all been effectively suppressed by conventional medicine. Bottom line, if humans are healthy, the healthcare industry does not survive. Thus, it's in its own inherently self-serving interest to promote illness in the name of wellness, (Hagopian, J., 2017).

Joachim Hagopian is a writer for the Centre for Research on Globalization, an independent registered nonprofit research and media organization based in Montreal. The nonprofit and global nature of this website backs its validity; however, it was nearly impossible to find anything about this author online, which raises doubts about his personal experience in the medical field. Is it possible that this whole idea of a massive downfall in terms of health has all been an elaborate ruse devised by the pharmaceutical companies? Although this does sound a bit like a wild conspiracy theory, it actually makes a lot of sense.

### Human Error

Another reason there may be falsity involved in our supposedly-awful modern health is the involvement of human error. One would think that, with the development of far more advanced medical technology, the human error factor would be lower. However, that may not necessarily be the case, according to Dr. Edward Group.

...it's estimated that nine million Americans are unnecessarily hospitalized every year. Every year, approximately seven to eight million people undergo unnecessary surgical or otherwise invasive medical procedures, plus a whopping 20 million unnecessary

prescriptions are written for antibiotics to treat minor VIRAL infections, (Group, E., 2013).

Dr. Edward Group is a medical doctor who has many qualifying degrees. His degrees prove his expertise in the medical field, however his position as a doctor may create room for influence on the information he puts into public view. This evidence proposed by Group is most likely a combination of human error and the wish to make more money off of people's medical "needs". Neither of these things are generationally-specific, which assists the theory that the rise in illness may not necessarily be a byproduct of the turn of the century. Given all of this information, it can be concluded that yes, the statistics show a growing trend in physical illness, but this could be due in equal parts to either a real problem or one that's fabricated.

### *Mental Health*

Our society and our bodies seem to be growing more susceptible to outside influence as the new century progresses; but what about our minds? There are trends emerging in deterioration of mental health as well, especially involving conditions such as depression and anxiety.

According to Robin Rosenberg,

Although fewer than 6 percent of American adults will have a severe mental illness in a given year, according to a 2005 study, many more—more than a quarter each year—will have some diagnosable mental disorder... Almost 50 percent of Americans...will have a diagnosable mental illness in their lifetimes, based on the previous edition, the DSM-IV. And the new manual will likely make it even "easier" to get a diagnosis, (Rosenberg, R., 2017).

Rosenberg has a Ph.D. and ABPP in psychology, 25 years of experience behind her, and practices currently as a psychologist and life coach. However, she is paid for this work, so she may wish to diagnose more people with mental illness to increase her earnings. These numbers are staggering. If half of the United States has a diagnosable mental disorder in their lifetime, it makes me wonder if the word 'disorder' should even be used to describe it anymore. At this point, they're more of a societal norm than an oddity.

But as aforementioned, this affects youth most of all. Based on a TIME Magazine article by Susanna Schrobsdorff,

A study of national trends in depression among adolescents and young adults published in the journal Pediatrics on November 14 found that the prevalence of teens who reported an MDE in the previous 12 months jumped from 8.7% in 2005 to 11.5% in 2014. That's a 37 percent increase, (Schrobsdorff, S., 2017).

Schrobsdorff has been writing for TIME Magazine, which runs out of New York City and was founded in 1923, since she was a college intern. However, since her salary depends on the quality of her stories, they may end up being overdramatic in the pursuit of public attention. The information provided here means that not only is depression extraordinarily common among teens and youth just like myself, but it's getting worse, and very quickly. Whether or not it's based on the hormonal and growing nature of teenage brains, this is a real, scary issue. If these numbers continue to rise as steadily as they have been, Robin Rosenberg's theory may prove true. These teenagers are the future adults of our generation. If this many have a reportable mental disorder just within the United States, how many more are there across the globe?

### The Reality/Non-Reality of Mental Illness

This dramatic rise in mental illness, however, raises some questions. One theory as to why this trend has emerged is that we're placing too many things under the "disease" umbrella. Is it possible that mental disorders are not even fully-understood enough to be properly diagnosable? CCHR brings this concept to light here.

Psychiatric disorders are not medical diseases. There are no lab tests, brain scans, X-rays or chemical imbalance tests that can verify any mental disorder is a physical condition. This is not to say that people do not get depressed, or that people can't experience emotional or mental duress, but psychiatry has repackaged these emotions and behaviors as 'disease' in order to sell drugs. This is a brilliant marketing campaign, but it is not science, (CCHR, 2018).

The Citizens Commission on Human Rights is a nonprofit mental health "watchdog" focused primarily upon human rights for the mentally-impaired. The information released by CCHR is backed by doctors, scientists, lawyers, legislators, educators, business professionals, artists, and civil and human rights representatives. This makes their information highly reliable and credible, especially considering that they have worked for over 40 years in this field. However, the website has the tendency to bash the pharmaceutical field, which may limit its neutrality. If this is true, that would mean that the pharmaceutical industry has expanded out of the physical illness field and found ways to rob the general public of its money in more creative ways. This would mean that the supposed rise in mental illness is not related to our human evolution at all, but is simply a byproduct of the greed of Big Pharma.

### Are We Simply More Able to Recognize These Disorders?

It is also possible, however, that with the modern technology and medical ability we possess in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are more able to recognize mental illness. According to the NCBI,

As scientists continue to investigate the brains of people who have mental illnesses, they are learning that mental illness is associated with changes in the brain's structure, chemistry, and function and that mental illness does indeed have a biological basis. This

ongoing research is, in some ways, causing scientists to minimize the distinctions between mental illnesses and these other brain disorders... (NCBI, 2018).

NCBI (The National Center for Biotechnology Information) is a wonderful source for medical articles and case studies of a scholarly level, making it a good source for this subject matter. However, many of its sources are unauthored, which creates questions as to how experienced its writers are. As we develop scientifically, we are able to make important discoveries about mental illness, such as the fact that many may actually have biological links. This makes them much easier to see and recognize, which is one possible reason for the positive trend in the prevalence of mental illness. There is a good possibility that, as a society, we've always had these problems, but that we are simply more able to see them now.

Similar ideas are represented here by the revolutionary inventor of Optogenetics, Karl Deisseroth.

'Psychiatric disorders are the leading cause of disability in the adult age groups. They are immensely costly, in terms of dollars and suffering and lives not lived to their fullest. On the research side, my team is building technologies needed to probe the structure and functioning of the brain not only for the abstract purpose of understanding its complexity but also to make it possible to better understand diseases and to come up with new ideas for truly precise treatments,' (Karl Deisseroth, 2013).

Karl Deisseroth, the man behind this technology, is an M.D., Ph.D., and professor of bioengineering and psychology at Stanford University. His revolutionary new tech and his place at Stanford University secure his validity and credibility in this field. Deisseroth invented something called Optogenetics.

With optogenetics, scientists can switch individually targeted brain cells on and off, one at a time, using colored beams of laser light and then observe the impact on behavior in living animals, (BBR Foundation, 2013).

This technology has transformed the medical field's ability to study the brain. Things like this are happening more and more as the 21<sup>st</sup> century progresses, which only proves that we are getting smarter, and gaining a better ability to monitor mental health, which could definitely be the reason for this seemingly-dramatic spike in the amount of mental illness worldwide. When analyzing these facts, it becomes clear that mental illness, while often puzzling to medical doctors and scientists, is becoming far more prevalent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than ever before, whether that's due to crooked medical companies and inexperienced doctors or a real rise in the mentally ill population.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, it would seem that there really is a rise in physical, mental, and cultural health issues happening in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, across the globe. But it also looks to be caused, sometimes, by factors outside that of the century's turn.

Through my research, I've learned much more about this than I thought I ever could. I've learned not just that we are more easily offended, but the theories of many professionals on why that's come to be. I've learned about what causes the medical complications we hear about on a daily basis, the evils of "Big Pharma" and their influence on our consumption of drugs, and about how common human error in the medical field is. I know more about anxiety and depression, and that they affect adolescents more than any other generation.

Through this barrage of information, I've discovered more about the modern medical field than I, in all honesty, would've ever wished to know. However, this has taught me that there are far more problems with modern medicine than I ever could've imagined, and I hope that, in the future, they will be better addressed and possibly even solved. To get here, where I am right now, it took a lot of careful revision and elimination, as I became so passionate about this topic that my original paper ended up being much further beyond the word count. However, I am glad that I dedicated the time to do that revision, as this is definitely an endeavor that I believe was successful enough to confidently show to professional readers.

This has definitely altered my personal ability to trust medical professionals. I used to feel safe entering a hospital or doctor's office with the assumption that they would give me the best, most professional care that they could. But I now know that human error is far more common than I previously believed, and there are many deaths due to these entirely preventable errors. I also know that, sometimes, these misdiagnoses are intentional, and result in wasted money and dangerous complications. I also now feel more cynical toward those who cry out 'discrimination,' as it is often unreasonable. Society has definitely become akin to a herd of sheep who believe everything they read in the media, and that is one major reason for this culture of overly-offended human beings.

To recap: there is decidedly a problem in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with major rises in mental and physical health problems, and many people becoming offended and angry over things that were once considered culturally-appropriate. There has definitely been a change, but that's not to say that it's for the reasons we may believe. It may have nothing to do with the turn of the century at all, and simply be based on more advanced technology or a dramatic change in cultural values and awareness. I hope this paper has helped to raise questions about things we may have taken for granted in the past, and may positively impact the choices and beliefs of 21<sup>st</sup> century society.

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