

READING RESPONSE # 2

For this reading response read the attached essay "From the Coddling of the American Mind" by Lukianoff and Haidt.

Summarize the essay – Remember to name the essay and the authors. What is the purpose?
What does the essay convey?

Response

Answer the following questions as part of the reading response

1. Do you believe you go to college to learn what to think or how to think?
2. Would you call the impulse behind the new environment on college campuses protectiveness? Who exactly is being protected?
3. Do you think the new protectiveness leaves students and faculty feeling confused about what can and can't be said on campus?
4. Should colleges be invested in students' emotional well-being?

This should be about 2-3 pages.

DUE DATE

wrote an e-mail to the entire student body apologizing to anyone who was "triggered or hurt by the content of the microaggressions."

According to the most basic tenets of psychology, helping people with anxiety disorders avoid the things they fear is misguided.

This new climate is slowly being institutionalized, and is affecting what can be said in the classroom, even as a basis for discussion. During the 2014–15 school year, for instance, the deans and department chairs at the 10 University of California system schools were presented by administrators at faculty leader-training sessions with examples of microaggressions. The list of offensive statements included: "America is the land of opportunity" and "I believe the most qualified person should get the job."

The press has typically described these developments as a resurgence of political correctness. That's partly right, although there are important differences between what's happening now and what happened in the 1980s and '90s. That movement sought to restrict speech (specifically hate speech aimed at marginalized groups), but it also challenged the literary, philosophical, and historical canon, seeking to widen it by including more diverse perspectives. The current movement is largely about emotional well-being. More than the last, it presumes

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an extraordinary fragility of the collegiate psyche, and therefore elevates the goal of protecting students from psychological harm. The ultimate aim, it seems, is to turn campuses into "safe spaces" where young adults are shielded from words and ideas that make some uncomfortable. And more than the last, this movement seeks to pun-

ish anyone who interferes with that aim, even accidentally. You might call this impulse *vindictive protectiveness*. It is creating a culture in which everyone must think twice before speaking up, lest they face charges of insensitivity, aggression, or worse.

We have been studying this development for a while now, with rising alarm. The dangers that these trends pose to scholarship and to the quality of American universities are significant; we could write a whole essay detailing them. But in this essay we focus on a different question: What are the effects of this new protectiveness on the students themselves? Does it benefit the people it is supposed to help? What exactly are students learning when they spend four years or more in a community that polices unintentional slights, places warning labels on works of classic literature, and in many other ways conveys the sense that words can be forms of violence that require strict

control by campus authorities, who are expected to act as both protectors and prosecutors?

There's a saying common in education circles: Don't teach students *what* to think; teach them *how* to think. The idea goes back at least as far as Socrates. Today, what we call the Socratic method is a way of teaching that fosters critical thinking, in part by encouraging students to question their own unexamined beliefs, as well as the received wisdom of those around them. Such questioning sometimes leads to discomfort, and even to anger, on the way to understanding. 8

But vindictive protectiveness teaches students to think in a very different way. It prepares them poorly for professional life, which often demands intellectual engagement with people and ideas one might find uncongenial or wrong. The harm may be more immediate, too. A campus culture devoted to policing speech and punishing speakers is likely to engender patterns of thought that are surprisingly similar to those long identified by cognitive behavioral therapists as causes of depression and anxiety. The new protectiveness may be teaching students to think pathologically. 9

From The Coddling of the American Mind

[The Atlantic, September 2015]

BEFORE YOU READ

How do you feel about attempts on college campuses to block words and ideas that might cause offense to someone? Is the new protectiveness on campus helping or hurting students?

WORDS TO LEARN

violate (para. 1): to transgress (verb)

paranoia (para. 1): mental disorder involving extreme suspicion of others (noun)

pseudonym (para. 1): made-up name used by an author; pen name (noun)

gingerly (para. 1): with great caution (adverb)

parlance (para. 2): way of speaking (noun)

misogyny (para. 2): hatred of women (noun)

recurrence (para. 2): a return of something, or to a previous condition (noun)

installation (para. 3): something erected or installed in a certain place (noun)

tenets (para. 4): beliefs (noun)

misguided (para. 4): mistaken (adjective)

collegiate (para. 6): relating to college and college students (adjective)

uncongenial (para. 9): disagreeable (adjective)

pathologically (para. 9): in terms of disease (adverb)

Something strange is happening at America's colleges and universities. A movement is arising, undirected and driven largely by students, to scrub campuses clean of words, ideas, and subjects that

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Greg Lukianoff is a lawyer who serves as the president and CEO of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. He is the author of Unlearning Liberty: Campus Censorship and the End of American Debate (2014). Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist, is a professor of ethical leadership at New York University's Stern School of Business. He has written two books, The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom (2006) and The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion (2012).

might cause discomfort or give offense. Last December, Jeannie Suk wrote in an online article for *The New Yorker* about law students asking her fellow professors at Harvard not to teach rape law — or, in one case, even use the word *violate* (as in “that violates the law”) lest it cause students distress. In February, Laura Kipnis, a professor at Northwestern University, wrote an essay in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* describing a new campus politics of sexual paranoia — and was then subjected to a long investigation after students who were offended by the article and by a tweet she’d sent filed Title IX¹ complaints against her. In June, a professor protecting himself with a pseudonym wrote an essay for *Vox* describing how gingerly he now has to teach. “I’m a Liberal Professor, and My Liberal Students Terrify Me,” the headline said. A number of popular comedians, including Chris Rock, have stopped performing on college campuses. Jerry Seinfeld and Bill Maher have publicly condemned the oversensitivity of college students, saying too many of them can’t take a joke.

Two terms have risen quickly from obscurity into common campus parlance. *Microaggressions* are small actions or word choices that seem on their face to have no malicious intent but that are thought of as a kind of violence nonetheless. For example, by some campus guidelines, it is a microaggression to ask an Asian American or Latino American “Where were you born?” because this implies that he or she is not a real American. *Trigger warnings* are alerts that professors are expected to issue if something in a course might cause a strong emotional response. For example, some students have called for warnings that Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* describes racial violence and that F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* portrays misogyny and physical abuse, so that students who have been previously victimized by racism or domestic violence can choose to avoid these works, which they believe might “trigger” a recurrence of past trauma.

Some recent campus actions border on the surreal. In April, at Brandeis University, the Asian American student association sought to raise awareness of microaggressions against Asians through an installation on the steps of an academic hall. The installation gave examples of microaggressions such as “Aren’t you supposed to be good at math?” and “I’m color-blind! I don’t see race.” But a backlash arose among other Asian American students, who felt that the display itself was a microaggression. The association removed the installation, and its president

¹ Title IX (para. 1): A federal law that forbids discrimination on the basis of sex in any educational setting that is federally funded