



Too Brittle for School?

One way I can tell I'm getting old, aside from it taking more time to get my socks on in the morning, is that my ideas might seem to some to be outmoded or, as I've been more flippantly described recently by a business friend, "old school."

I've always thought, for example, that a central purpose of a university is to challenge students with new ideas, to be a place where they're exposed to a variety of opinions and clashing concepts, so they can intellectually grow and develop their own well-formed ideas and philosophies.

Nevertheless, there's now a craze on campus of developing "safe places" — insulated and protective bubbles where students can go and not be not knocked off their rockers by words or comments they might say are unwelcome.

The bubbles are designed to be unreal places, organized around a deliberate phoniness of forced calm and unanimity where the fragility of a student's temperament or mindset is less likely to encounter the rough and tumble of the actual world or hear an idea that could produce even a smidgen of disapproval or anxiety.

The goal is the creation of an environment where injury to the more vulnerable is minimized, as with a straightjacket, the creation of a benign place where supposed psychic wounding is identified by way of thin-skinned cries of "injury," followed by institutional punishments to eradicate what are now classified as micro-aggressions — words, lectures or discussions that supposedly produce tiny traumas, petite micro-wounds, nothing on the scale of what happens to American soldiers of roughly the same age in Iraq or Afghanistan.

"Something strange is happening at America's colleges and universities," wrote Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt in "The Coddling of the American Mind" recently in *The Atlantic*. "A movement is arising, undirected and driven largely by students, to scrub campuses clean of words, ideas, and subjects that might cause discomfort or give offense."

The ironic result is that students, in the name of emotional well-being, are increasingly protesting for protection from words and ideas they don't like, producing a situation that Lukianoff and Haidt categorize as "disastrous for education — and mental health."

"Last December, Jeannie Suk wrote in an online article for *The New Yorker* about law students asking their 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," report Lukianoff and Haidt.

In February, students filed Title IX complaints against Laura Kipnis, a professor at Northwestern University, because they were offended by the words she wrote in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* describing a new campus politics of sexual paranoia.





Written by [Ralph R. Reiland](#) on November 29, 2015

The absurdity is now at the point where even good-natured people who tell funny stories for a living are finding the cliques of perpetually offended college attendees to be insufferable.

Chris Rock and Jerry Seinfeld have stopped playing colleges, while Bill Mahr found no shortage of ludicrousness in the “Bias-Free Language Guide” developed by students at the University of New Hampshire.

“Rich” is labeled as problematic/outdated in the guide; preferred is “a person of material wealth.”

“American” is to be replaced with “resident of the U.S.,” while “foreigners” should be “international people.”

“Guys” is wrong when “referring to people overall.” Preferred is “y’all.”

“Man’s achievements” is to be changed to “human achievements,” but even that might represent the prejudice of human chauvinism since it doesn’t recognize the key role that monkeys play in testing eyeliner or the vital contribution that pigs make to a BLT.

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