



The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure

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A timely investigation into the campus assault on free speech and what it means for students, education, and our democracy.

The generation now coming of age has been taught three Great Untruths: their feelings are always right; they should avoid pain and discomfort; and they should look for faults in others and not themselves. These three Great Untruths are part of a larger philosophy that sees young people as fragile creatures who must be protected and supervised by adults. But despite the good intentions of the adults who impart them, the Great Untruths are harming kids by teaching them the opposite of ancient wisdom and the opposite of modern psychological findings on grit, growth, and antifragility. The result is rising rates of depression and anxiety, along with endless stories of college campuses torn apart by moralistic divisions and mutual recriminations.

This is a book about how we got here. First Amendment expert Greg Lukianoff and social psychologist Jonathan Haidt take us on a tour of the social trends stretching back to the 1980s that have produced the confusion and conflict on campus today, including the loss of unsupervised play time and the birth of social media, all during a time of rising political polarization.

This is a book about how to fix the mess. The culture of "safety" and its intolerance of opposing viewpoints has left many young people anxious and unprepared for adult life, with devastating consequences for them, for their parents, for the companies that will soon hire them, and for a democracy that is already pushed to the brink of violence over its growing political divisions. Lukianoff and Haidt offer a comprehensive set of reforms that will strengthen young people and institutions, allowing us all to reap the benefits of diversity, including viewpoint diversity.

This is a book for anyone who is confused by what's happening on college campuses today, or has children, or is concerned about the growing inability of Americans to live and work and cooperate across party lines.

The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure Details

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From Reader Review The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure for online ebook

Michael Shore says

The central tenets of this book are good but incredibly repetitive and fluffed up. Towards the end of the book, I wanted to shoot myself everytime I read the word "saftyism." The book started out as an article, which explains a lot. It should've stayed an article.

Also, the Authors fail to provide compelling evidence in support of their hypothesis that we are facing a generational crisis. They largely backup their sweeping generalizations about "I-Gen" with extreme anecdotal cases. The section on mental health included a lot of good data, but that was the exception.

Lastly, this book (like many others) seems to be confused about whether it's descriptive or prescriptive in nature. Sure, it can both, but there was a confusing blend of the two that made it feel awkward. For example, there are sections with highly detailed instructions on how to practice CBT which seemed completely out of place given the general thrust of the book.

Jenna says

Education should not be intended to make people comfortable; it is meant to make them think. ~Hanna Gray

I'm not sure how to begin this review other than to say it was highly interesting and highly disturbing. Having read iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us, I was somewhat aware of what is taking place in universities across the US. The authors of *"The Coddling of American Minds* write a similar book but giving many more examples of the erosion of free speech on campuses. I'm flabbergasted! How can universities, the very places where freedom of speech was most protected, now be censoring both professors and students in order to not offend anyone? In order to not "harm" students with ideas? Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt explain why this is taking place, how we have turned into a culture of fragility and over-protection. It is one thing to not allow hate speech, as the authors are quick to point out, but quite another to suppress any view that might go against what students believe, in order to not "harm" them by exposing them to alternate points of view.

Why are universities firing professors for bringing up "hot" issues? Why are they banning controversial speakers? Why are they limiting what even the students can say? It all starts with over-parenting and treating children as fragile things that cannot withstand anything. Of course, this comes from a good place -- a good parent does not want their child to be hurt and wants to protect them from all harm. I'm not a parent but I can understand that. We don't want those we love to be hurt or suffer. However, we as society have gone too far, from "protecting" our children from peanuts and thus greatly increasing the number of children with deadly allergies to them, to protecting them from alternate views and conflicting ideas. We don't allow children to grow if we keep them from being exposed to things that challenge them. The authors say that children are not fragile, but anti-fragile. We need to protect them from serious harm of course, but by coddling them and

treating even teens as young children, we are hurting their future prospects and making it more difficult for them to succeed in the adult world.

The authors cite numerous examples of this overprotection, both of young children and extending onto college campuses. They list 3 Untruths that now often govern how children are raised and are causing them to be more anxious and depressed than previous generations:

- The Untruth of Fragility: "What doesn't kill you makes you weaker."
- The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: "Always trust your feelings."
- The Untruth of Us Versus Them: "Life is a battle between good people and evil people."

The 3 criteria for an idea to be classified as an Untruth are:

- "It contradicts ancient wisdom."
- "It contradicts modern psychological research on well-being."
- It harms the individuals and communities who embrace it."

I will not expand on these in my review but highly recommend the book for any who is interested. I would like to say though, that I do not wholly agree with the first criteria, that of something being untrue in part because it contradicts ancient wisdom. I would argue that just because something has always been held "true" doesn't mean it is. In fact, just because something has always been held true is reason in itself to challenge the assumption. Society would make no progress if "truths" were never questioned, and each generation merely accepted what the prior ones said. We would still be burning people at the stake, still be stoning people to death for adultery, still be cutting off hands for the theft of bread, still be enslaving people (well, we are in a way, if you look at the prison industry in the US, but that's for another discussion), still be locking up gay people. Sometimes we NEED to contradict ancient wisdom.

That said, I mostly agree with this book and the assertions put forth by the authors. I was disturbed to learn the state of our "educational" system and how polarized things have become, but I was also disturbed because the book compelled me to think in depth about my own polarization of recent politics, my own growing rigidity and biases against conservatives. It is not easy to confront ones flaws, but that is critical if we are ever to grow and learn or change that which needs changed. I am grateful for this book for pushing me as much as it did. It is difficult to NOT become polarized when we don't often engage with others with differing points of view. We are shown on social media and search engines that which the algorithms know we already agree with and so are further strengthened in our confirmation bias. This is leading to a country that has not been so divided since the Civil War and it is increasingly difficult for people to get along. Does this mean we have to accept that which we know to be wrong? No, absolutely not. But it does mean we need to listen to what the other side has to say and not merely demonize and ignore them because they think differently than we do. I think there is a fine line at times, between hate speech and free speech and I'm still not sure where the line needs to be drawn. Drawn it must be; people must be protected from those who would harm them and incite violence against them. However, people do not need to be protected from merely hearing differing points of view. I love the following advice from the book:

"Argue as if you're right, but listen as if you're wrong (and be willing to change your mind). Make the most respectful interpretation of the other person's perspective. Acknowledge where you agree with your critics and what you've learned from them."

I think this is advice we can all learn to follow and will be better and stronger people for it. The authors end the book with advice for parents and educators, on how to better raise strong and flexible children. I highly recommend this book to those people, but also for people like myself who are concerned with the world we live in and want to do our own part in making it a better place for all.

Bob says

Summary: Discusses three bad ideas that result in a culture of "safetyism" in higher education, chronicles the consequences of these bad ideas, traces factors that led to the embrace of these ideas, and how we might choose a wiser way.

1. The Untruth of Fragility: What doesn't kill you makes you weaker.
2. The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: Always trust your feelings.
3. The Untruth of Us Versus Them: Life is a battle between good people and evil people.

Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt contend that these three bad ideas constitute a well-intentioned but toxic basis for a campus culture of "safetyism." They argue that these ideas contradict ancient wisdom, psychological research on well-being, and are harmful to the individuals and communities who embrace this mindset. Lukianoff, the president of FIRE (Foundation for Individual Rights in Education) and Haidt, a social psychologist perhaps best known for his recent work, *The Righteous Mind*, began to notice, from 2013 on, an increasing trend of concern on university campuses about "triggering material," efforts to disinvite, or obstruct controversial speakers by heckling or even violence, coupled with reports of increasing levels of anxiety and fears about safety.

There seemed to be an increasing perception by university administrators that students were "fragile" and needed protection and "safe spaces." They noted the priority given to feelings, and that the response to anything that evokes negative emotions is not to consider how one ought think about the external cause, but to simply remove whatever offends or causes stress--be it course material or offensive speakers, or perceived "microaggressions." They also noted the framing of the world in terms of a toxic form of identity politics, focused on common enemies rather than common humanity--us versus them, good versus evil.

After delineating the contours and problems with these "three great untruths," the authors chronicle a number of incidents in the last five years that they believe result from these often well-intentioned but bad ideas. They chronicle violent outcomes to this thinking at Berkeley after Milo Yiannopoulos was invited to speak with no disciplinary action by the university, and at Middlebury College when controversial scholar Charles Murray attempted to speak and a hosting faculty member suffered a concussion and whiplash requiring six months of physical therapy, in attempts to disrupt the event. Perhaps not as well publicized were the "witch hunts," often against liberal faculty like Erika Christakis at Yale, who objected to an administration's paternalistic instructions about offensive Halloween costumes, suggesting that students might be mature enough to set their own norms. Students called her out as a racist, for creating an unsafe space, and sought her firing. She ultimately resigned. On many campuses, faculty feel they are walking on egg shells, often choosing to avoid anything controversial for fear that it may evoke complaints, or a witch hunt.

The authors identify six contributing factors to this culture of safetyism, devoting a chapter to each:

1. Rising political polarization, with campuses shifting leftward and increasingly distrusted by those on the right.
2. An increase in adolescent anxiety and depression beginning in 2011, significantly correlating to smartphone usage. This group began arriving on campus in 2013.
3. Paranoid parenting resulting in far less unsupervised play and greater fears of abduction (even though crime rates for this crime have dropped).
4. The decline of free play and the rise of emphasis on test preparation.
5. The growth of a bureaucracy of safetyism at universities, driven by federal mandates, risks of lawsuits, and a consumerist mentality, in which students are the consumers.
6. The quest for justice, evoked by events between 2012 and 2018 that sometimes focuses on "equal outcomes social justice" in which any demographic disparity is assumed to be the result of discrimination, and alternative explanations are themselves considered discriminatory.

The authors observe that many of these factors arise from good intentions taken to extremes and are careful to distinguish between legitimate forms of concern (like protecting physical safety) and more extreme forms of safetyism.

They conclude with three chapters on wising up, with applications to children, to universities, and to the wider society. They argue for preparing kids for the road rather than the road for the kids. They propose that our worst enemies cannot harm us as much as our emotional reasoning. And they encourage the recognition that "the line dividing good and evil goes through the heart of every human being," and that we ought be watchful for any institution that promotes a common enemy rather than common humanity narrative. They commend the Chicago Statement (including a version of it in an appendix) that promotes free speech, academic freedom and free inquiry and sanctioning efforts to suppress speech.

The authors, particularly Greg Lukianoff, who benefited personally from this approach, advocate for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) that improves mental health and coping skills through recognizing cognitive distortions and maladaptive behaviors, and challenging and changing these. Essentially, they would contend that their "three bad ideas" are both cognitive distortions and lead to maladaptive behaviors good neither for the person, nor the university, nor society. Hence, it should be understood that CBT is integral to their critique and recommendations.

Working in a collegiate setting, I've seen many of the conditions the authors describe. Most faculty I know readily resonate with the feeling that they walk on egg shells, even while being deeply committed to academic freedom and challenging students thinking. I've seen the growing sensitivity to microaggressions. I've witnessed the surprise when I've suggested that being offended is a choice--that no one can offend us unless we let them, and that there are other options. I have been concerned that universities often seem to be echo chambers for the progressive end of our political discourse, blind to the very practices they excoriate on the right.

Given the character of our wider society, it seems the last thing universities should be doing is engaging in the kinds of "coddling" Lukianoff and Haidt describe. If we are to have any hope, it will take resilient, anti-fragile people who will engage and keep engaging differing and even off-putting ideas. Most of all, in a climate of us versus them, we need people able to follow the Pauli Murray's principle: "When my brothers try to draw a circle to exclude me, I shall draw a larger circle to include them." Here's to drawing larger circles!

Caitlin says

Thank you to Goodreads and the publisher for the free advance copy!!

This was an excellent and informative read. If you've ever wondered and worried about the worrying trend of people being publically shamed and harassed to the point that they've lost their reputations, careers and sometimes even physical safety just for expressing an unpopular opinion, this book is an absolute must read. It's actually bipartisan and takes a long scathing look at worrying trends from the left as well as the right and really delves deep into how and why these problems exist, why they're getting so much worse and how we can try to fix them.

I can't recommend this one enough. Its thoroughly researched and backed up not just by social science data, but often hard science. I feel thoroughly more informed for having read it and it was honestly a pretty smooth read.

Five thought-provoking stars.

Robert Miller says

There can be little doubt that students entering our colleges and universities for the past several years are traveling to the beat of a different drum. For the most part, many of these young men and women are developmentally challenged in several ways. Their stunted growth is the result of their parent's upbringing; the students have been coddled by their parents, trained to fear anyone outside of their immediate circles, prohibited from engaging in creative thinking, stopped from normal play activities, subjected to increased study activities following a typical school day (even at the kindergarten level), denied opportunities to explore their neighborhoods without adult supervision (lest they are kidnapped), and the list goes on.

The authors explore the negative impact of obsessive "screen time" (I-phones, computers, etc.) use and the pitfalls of social media where (especially girls) are instantly judged and scored.

All of these factors have to lead to record increases in reported cases of high anxiety, depression, impatience, intolerance, fragility, and a willingness to harshly judge others who they unreasonably deem to be threatening. These so-called "I-gen" teenagers formulate a culture where it is a "us against them" mentality—there is no middle ground. Speakers at their colleges who express ideologies different from these students are attacked and forced off of college campuses. Members of their group are "called out" and shunned if they deviate from the perspectives of the group. Even liberal professors who write or say something that even slightly hints at a philosophy different from the group are attacked. Administrators often take the coddled students to side out of fear—indeed, some college officials regard students as customers and design cushy and exotic surroundings for students—colleges are in the money business—officials also live in constant fear of lawsuits.

Authors Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt write a book that defines the issues and problems of the I-gen and offer possible solutions. Great book.

Ryan Boissonneault says

Imagine that you want to start a fitness program to increase your strength and endurance and sign up at the local gym. Upon arrival, you notice that management has removed all of the weights, concerned that heavy weights can cause stress and injury. Instead, you are instructed to perform light body-weight exercises that you can already safely handle. As you go through the motions of exercise, progress is nonexistent and you'll be entirely unprepared for any activities that might require greater strength and endurance.

Welcome to (some) modern universities, which engage in the intellectual equivalent of removing the weights from the gym by creating safe spaces, disinviting speakers, removing offensive material, and inhibiting free speech and inquiry that should be the staple of a college education. Attending a university with these policies to prepare for the challenges of the outside world is like training for a marathon in our weightless gym.

The analogy is apt because the human mind, like the musculoskeletal system, is antifragile. Whereas fragile systems break under pressure and resilient systems can withstand pressure without change, antifragile systems become *stronger* under pressure. If you want to enhance your physical strength, you have to lift progressively heavier weight; if you want to enhance your intellectual fortitude, you have to expose yourself to different and sometimes controversial or offensive ideas.

This is the topic Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt tackle in *The Coddling of the American Mind*. They frame the issue around the “three great untruths” that are promoted on some campuses across the US, which are creating an environment that not only blocks open inquiry and learning but that leads to polarization, emotional immaturity, fragility, violence, and mental illness.

The three untruths are 1) what doesn’t kill you makes you weaker, 2) always trust your feelings, and 3) life is a battle between good people and evil people. These three untruths, taken together, create a student body that is unreceptive to other viewpoints, dogmatic, easily offended, and self-righteous, eager to earn points within the group by calling out and ostracizing those with different views. The great untruths are damaging both socially and psychologically, and run counter to both the principles of cognitive behavioral therapy (used to treat anxiety and depression) and ancient wisdom regarding well-being and happiness.

The great untruths therefore lead to the types of mental habits that our best therapy aims to eradicate, such as catastrophizing, emotional reasoning, overgeneralizing, dichotomous thinking, labeling, blaming, and negative filtering. Universities are encouraging, in other words, the very habits that lead to anxiety and depression and emotional stunting.

The authors dive deeply into these issues in the first two parts of the book and then describe the historical, social, psychological, and political reasons why we find ourselves in this situation. The fourth and final part of the book offers solutions, which I would summarize as follows.

The problems on campus can ultimately be solved by focusing on developing the virtues of intellectual courage, humility, and emotional resilience in our children and students. First, intellectual humility forces one to recognize that humans are fallible and prone to bias and error, both individually and collectively. Since we are often blind to our own errors, the only possibility of correcting our misjudgments is through exposure to competing ideas. As the authors put it, exposure to someone that disagrees with you is a gift. They can either change your mind, thus correcting your errors and biases, or else strengthen your own beliefs in the process of defending them.

The second virtue, intellectual courage, is the habit of pursuing the truth wherever it may lead and embracing the values of free speech and open inquiry. It's the recognition that you may be wrong, that you may not have all of the answers, and that the development of your intellect depends on defending your ideas against competing views rather than shutting them down through force or violence.

The third virtue, emotional resilience, is the habit of handling adversity appropriately and taking control of your own emotions and reactions. Words are not violence, and being offended does not count as a point or an argument. This reminds me of three quotes by Christopher Hitchens that captures the spirit:

- “If someone tells me that I've hurt their feelings, I say, 'I'm still waiting to hear what your point is.'”
- “In this country, I've been told, 'That's offensive' as if those two words constitute an argument or a comment.”
- “Those who are determined to be 'offended' will discover a provocation somewhere. We cannot possibly adjust enough to please the fanatics, and it is degrading to make the attempt.”

The best defense against false or immoral ideas is rigorous intellectual debate and criticism, and the censorship of ideas only makes those ideas **more** appealing to your opponents and to those who are never exposed to the proper criticisms. Shouting down a speaker is immature and intellectually and emotionally cowardly and has no place within a university. If you want to call yourself a liberal, you should have no problem winning the war of words with religious fundamentalists or racists without having to suppress their speech. Sticking with the Christopher Hitchens theme, can you imagine if, instead of engaging in dozens of debates with religious conservatives, he instead called for their speech to be suppressed? How much weaker and ineffective would his position have been?

As the authors point out, this is not happening at every university, and there is some debate as to whether or not this is as big of problem as it appears. In fact, it might not be; but it's important to get out in front of the issue before it *becomes* a bigger problem. The authors cite some fairly egregious examples from a handful of universities, but also note that there are many exceptions. In particular, the University of Chicago remains a leader in free speech and inquiry and published the Chicago Statement on Principles of Free Expression, which every college student and parent should read. Over 40 institutions have adopted this policy, and hopefully more will follow suit.

Ryan says

Much as I've come to admire Haidt, I'll admit that I was worried to see this title, which seems like a typical "culture wars" click bait. How did the book hold up upon reading it?

This is a reasonably argued book about extreme incidents on American college campuses and how they relate to the larger culture. The title *is* bad, however, because it makes the text at first glance combative in a way that I don't associate with Haidt. (I generally view him as persuading from a pretty easily established common ground, such as when he discusses his use of prozac in *The Happiness Hypothesis* or how he explains in *Righteous Mind* that he was motivated by Al Gore's defeat in the 2000 American presidential election to study moral psychology.) In my humble opinion, it is easy to see where Haidt is coming from and why he finds his conclusions convincing. That is true here, even if the title is awful.

Briefly, the book worries about a culture of "safetyism." There are three "great untruths" in safetyism, which are: 1) Fragility: what doesn't kill you makes you weaker 2) Emotional reasoning: always trust your feelings

and 3) Us vs. Them: life is a battle between good and evil. They also highlight 10 distorted automatic thoughts, which are: mind reading, fortune telling (negatively predicting the future), catastrophic thinking, labelling, discounting the positive, negative filtering, overgeneralizing, dichotomous thinking, shoulds ("I should do well; if I don't, then I'm a failure"), and personalizing blame. The culture of safetyism does not challenge these distorted automatic thoughts, perhaps because it fears that it will make people feel bad about themselves, which sets off the untruths. As much as I distrust "great" anythings in social commentary about the present, I don't think it's hard to understand what they're talking about.

For anyone who's reluctant to engage with a book that gives off even a whiff of "culture wars" discourse, I'll note that there are other interesting ideas here, such "concept creep." Haidt and Lukianoff use trauma, a term that was originally meant to describe physical injury, as an example. It has since expanded to include psychological trauma, but originally with the caution that psychological trauma happens in response to extreme situations. The unexpected death of one's spouse from a sudden illness would not qualify as traumatic under the second generation definition. However, the third generation definition now is shaped by how the person who feels the emotions characterizes them. So if the unexpected death of one's spouse feels awful and the bereaved labels it traumatic, it seems like it can be, by this definition, traumatic.

As much as I'd like to promote *Coddling* as more than a book about culture wars questions, it does explore how they play out in Gen Z on college campuses. I was familiar with some of the violent protests the book explored, but not all of them. They really are awful, sometimes obnoxious, to read about. I was also surprised by Haidt and Lukianoff's history of how right-wing media outlets respond to anything that even vaguely threatens their worldview. At one point, they discuss a professor's theory about ancient statues--that they were not alabaster white originally but only later aged to those colors. In other words, the ancient world has become whiter in historical accounts. Fascinating! What happened when this theory was reported on right-wing news outlets? Threats of rape and death from people near and far.

Let's imagine that we might include *Coddling* as part of a stack. What else might one read? I'd include Haidt's previous book, *Righteous Mind*, Ronson's *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*, and Nagle's *Kill All Normies*. What about Storr's *Unpersuadables*, a book that explores things that seem ridiculous and twists them until they seem convincing, or at least not ridiculous. (Russell is also quite good at this in his *History of Western Philosophy*, perhaps because he feels one should understand why people feel they are right before figuring out why they are wrong.) I've since read Saslow's *Rising Out of Hatred*, which may be one very effective demonstration of how campuses are not inherently dysfunctional. In it, the college population ostracizes a white nationalist, but some students also reach out to him to try to reverse his views. Maybe Haidt is focusing on atypical scenarios.

We are not as good at empathy as we think we are, and it's difficult but worthwhile to charitably study views we are skeptical of. It's perhaps worth noting that I only picked up this book, with its click bait title, because I had a reading relationship with Haidt from his previous work. We live within bubbles that we are hardly aware of.

*P.S. Since reading this book, I've heard Ezra Klein talk about these issues on his podcast (It's the Ask Ezra episode, somewhere around 3/4s in.) He is also going to have Haidt on the show--update again: it was interesting.

Radiantflux says

97th book for 2018.

This again seems like a good article that got bloated unnecessarily into a book. There are some good points about the necessity to develop resilience in children, but with little strong substance to back things up. The arguments seem very one-side and cherry-picked. Reading this book you'd think that snowflake liberal children are rioting on every campus in America.

Also the focus of the book is a bit unclear to me: is it a critique of the commercialization of the university system in America, where students have become consumers, or is it a critique of current child rearing practices in the USA?

Mostly it seems to be a criticism of a few selectively picked incidents that have occurred over the last year in the America, without giving any credence to the aggressive culture wars that are occurring throughout the USA at this moment.

Two-stars.

Justin Norman says

When I read Haidt's book, "The Righteous Mind", I found it to be the most important book I'd read in years, because it so accurately seemed to capture the central issues liberals and conservatives in America were having communicating with one another. This book zooms in to highlight these issues in even more accurate detail, in great part due to the fact that it was very recently written and published. Some examples: the blocking of political opponents from speaking publicly, the trending lie that if one feels unsafe one *is* unsafe, and the practice of "common enemy identity politics" as opposed to "common humanity identity politics". While the authors focus their attention on these issues as they appear on college campuses, I see very similar problems in many areas outside of colleges and outside the usual college age range. If I could recommend one political book for my friends to read this year, it would be this one, regardless of where they sit on the political spectrum. It skewers poor, distorted forms of communication using very recent examples, and offers productive suggestions for how to achieve social justice goals in healthier ways.

Ariella says

I was lucky enough to read an advance copy of this book, and will be recommending it to at least half the people I know. Its insights into the various developments over the past couple generations(parenting, social media, identity politics) weave a fascinating (if often dispiriting) and comprehensive picture of how we got to the current political climate, particularly on campus. The book is challenging in many respects, while remaining accessible and engaging. I'll be thinking about it for a long time to come, and hope others will, too.

Perry says

Hallelujah and Amen!

A definite TBR for parents of kids 'tween 2 and 22 - the iGen.

Emily May says

I saw Jonathan Haidt speak on *Real Time* and he seemed like an intelligent guy with a lot of interesting ideas, so I patiently waited for this book to become available at my library. I'm also curious about this notion of kids being overprotected or "coddled".

It's looking more and more like the developed world's need to protect its kids, wrap them in bubble wrap, and disinfect everything might be the cause of a variety of unsavoury things, from Berkeley banning speakers to the rise in childhood leukemia. I don't necessarily agree with all the authors' ideas - such as their thinly-veiled disdain for feminists who talk about rape culture - but I do think they make some important points.

The truth is, though, this essay-turned-book should really have just stayed an essay. The authors' three Great Untruths make a thoughtful opinion piece, but there's not a full-length book hidden in the idea. The result of them trying to extend their commentary to a modest 269 pages is a lot of repetition, weak graphs that demonstrate a very small number of people doing a very small number of things, and odd tangents. An example of this latter is the lengthy instruction in how to do Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

A lot of the "evidence" is anecdotal, and focuses on a few extreme cases. Perhaps these are indicative of a larger trend, but I don't see anything in this book to convince me of that. I guess I should have just read the article this book grew out of.

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III D says

In spite of an incredibly Pollyana-ish ending, *Coddling of the American Mind* is an otherwise superbly well written and well researched book about one of the most pressing issues of contemporary American politics: Political Correctness. Standing comfortably aside modern intellectual heavyweights such as Jordan Peterson who have critiqued our cultural milieu, I was not the least bit surprised with the message within. However, I was particularly surprised to discover that A: the authors are neither Republicans nor Right-Wing in any fashion (as stated in the book, they've voted Democrat their whole lives) and B: That Political Correctness is just one gear in the machine of the world before us.

Compounded with Safetyism (which is mind-bogglingly out of place in the safest era in recorded history), For-Profit-Colleges (that want to rope in customers for as long as possible), and a newly mutated ladder in life in which most every aspect of maturity has been delayed, Haidt and Co. have presented a well-rounded picture that is deservedly multi-faceted and complex yet eminently readable and accessible for anyone with an IQ over 90. Given all the source material used, I was pleasantly surprised to read such an enjoyably well written tome that is as pertinent as it is convincing.

While I certainly don't agree with all their politics, conclusions (and even some of the research itself), having found myself working with Millennial peers over the past few years, this book has made me all the more aware of the immense shifts in culture and attitudes that have forged this generation and their values. For the

most part, there really is, “nothing new under the sun,” but, for this generation, and the next, a whole host of changes have occurred and will certainly continue to occur and I hope we can have excellent researchers and educators as Haidt and Co. to help us make sense of the complexity before us.

Thanks for listening.

David says

This is a fascinating but very disturbing book about how college students have recently been caught in the three great untruths. The first untruth is that one's feelings are the best guide to correctness. The second is that one should avoid pain or discomfort; what doesn't kill you makes you weaker. And the third untruth is that one should find fault in others, and not in one's self.

This book is not about helicopter parents, although they certainly contribute. It is about a new culture of safety-ism. In this culture, one should always seek safety, even emotional safety. If someone says something to you that makes you uncomfortable, then what he says is unsettling, harmful, and the person who said it is evil. Each person is either good or evil, and there is no middle ground. And, if someone says anything that makes you feel uncomfortable or stressed, then that person is evil.

From time to time, we hear about college students who protest speakers who have been invited to give talks on unsettling subjects, or who have unpopular viewpoints. The college administration is then pressured to retract the invitation, even though the speech is bound to be a learning experience for all. Sometimes a faculty member tries to help a student, is sincere and respectful, but a student takes the attempt the wrong way. The student raises a big stink, characterizes the instructor as harmful and therefore evil. Other faculty members secretly agree with the instructor, but are scared of voicing their dissenting opinions. The college administration is cowed into placating the students, and is not true to the mission of a college.

What is the purpose of a college? While some would argue that a college's purpose is to teach skills, an equally important purpose is to prepare students for their post-college life. After college, people are exposed to all sorts of viewpoints, including both good and obnoxious points of view. An important purpose of a college is to inoculate its students, to make them stronger for the future. The best way to do that is to expose students to differing points of view, even unsettling ideas, so that students can become more critical thinkers and not over-stressed by people of other persuasions.

Many years ago I went to a public university, and heard invited speakers give talks that were very controversial. Students who didn't want to hear these speakers always had the option not to attend. They did not protest against the speakers, depriving others of a learning opportunity. It was that simple.

This book takes the reader on a journey through recent events on college campuses. These events are extremely disturbing, and made me sick that today's students, teachers, parents, and college administrators are often so weak-minded. They have lost their way, and forgotten that while *physical* safety is absolutely important, *emotional* safety is not necessarily bad for one's health. But now I have a better understanding of what is happening in college campuses today.

I didn't read this book--I listened to the audiobook, which is narrated by one of the authors, Jonathan Haidt. He is an exception to the rule--Haidt is an amazingly good reader, and I truly enjoyed listening to his

narration.

Mehrsa says

This is a very narrow and small-minded book parading as a big thoughtful one. It says it is about the American Mind, but the data and the theory only support "the coddling" of a very narrow subset of the American mind: upper middle class college kids born after 1995 that got to college in 2013. As far as that group is concerned, this is really good advice. I totally agree with his three untruths--your feelings are not necessarily true, the world is not good and evil, and adversity does not make you weak. I also agree that children need lots of free play and that social media is bad for kids and they are over-protected. There is nothing to disagree with here (even though I sometimes chafe at "when we were kids..." arguments)

HOWEVER, using this group's specific problems, the authors make vast over-generalizations. The few anecdotes highlighted are meant to be examples of a deeper problem, but to me, they are the sum total of the problem. Left leaning students are behaving very badly toward conservative speakers. At most, there are 10 or so highly publicized events that seem to play on a loop among conservatives and intellectual dark web types. And there are no defenses to these behaviors, but it hardly represents our nation. And they provide no data whatsoever that it does. It's too soon to even tell that the next generation will be like this one.

And for people who seem to care a lot about both sides arguments, they seem to leave out a lot of counter-examples. Here are a few:

1. They talk about the metoo movement once in the beginning. Is that not a product of this "call out" generation? None of us "old" women had the "balls" to speak truth to power like these young women do. Good for them.
2. And the Parkland teens and all the ways in which this generation is more compassionate and engaged than we were. My generation (I'm 40) thought it was cool not to care about anything. My middle school kid stays up after school making protest signs and watching political debates. Is that not progress?
3. The authors also focuses on one particular subset of an entire generation (left-leaning, and mostly women and LGBT or Trans students asking for safe spaces). They leave out that Gamergate and the trolls and the alt right are also made up of this generation. Why not talk about them at all? Seriously. They are literally the same age and except for one aside in the entire book that "the right does it too" there are no examples at all of the right doing the thing they are decrying. It seemed like a half-assed "both sides" argument without support.
4. Do you know how many books I've read written by old people decrying the hippie generation of the 60s (Alan Bloome's Closing of the American Mind is an example)? Bloome was talking about Haidt and Luijanoff. Boy do they grow up fast.
5. It makes me sad that more people will read this book than will read books highlighting actual big problems like inequality. The authors give a nod to the fact that inequality should definitely be remedied, but they would rather you do it the right way and not call it "social justice."

Again, I agree with all the parenting advice and the cognitive behavior advice, but this is not a self-help book. It's meant as a polemic and it strikes at the wrong target.
