

The Coddling of the American Mind:

Implications for mental health, and for the medical profession



Jonathan Haidt, NYU-Stern

American Osler Society

April 11, 2021



He has frequently been described as the Father of Modern Medicine and one of the "greatest diagnosticians ever to wield a stethoscope. Osler was a person of many interests, who in addition to being a physician, was a bibliophile, historian, author, and renowned practical joker.

[He notes the remarkable increase in Man's physical well-being, then:]

The sorrows and troubles of men, it is true, may not have been materially diminished, but bodily pain and suffering, though not abolished, have been assuaged as never before...

Sorrows and griefs are companions sure sooner or later to join us on our pilgrimage, and we have become perhaps more sensitive to them, and perhaps less amenable to the old time remedies of the physicians of the soul.

--Osler, 1914, Teaching and Thinking

The most fundamental question in life:

Approach?

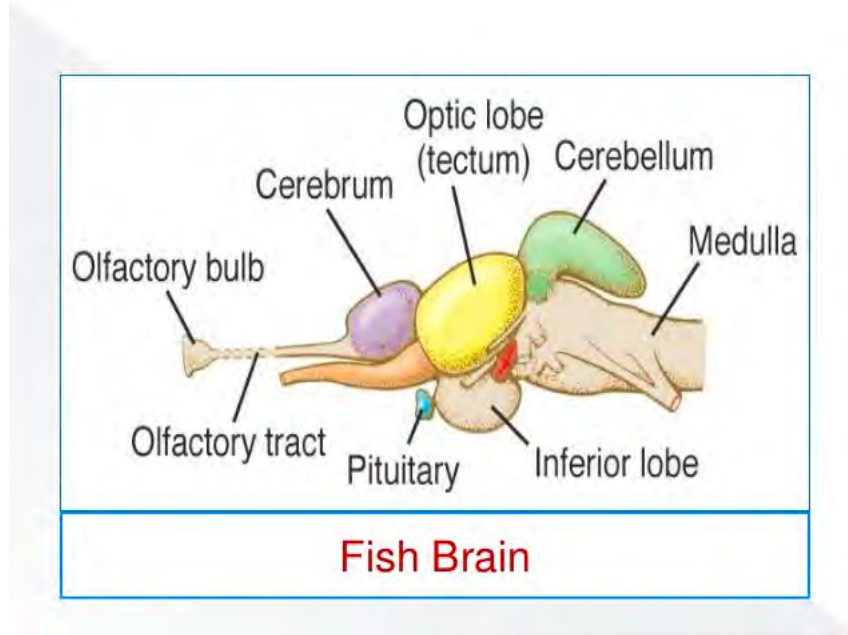


Avoid?

The most fundamental question in life:

Approach?

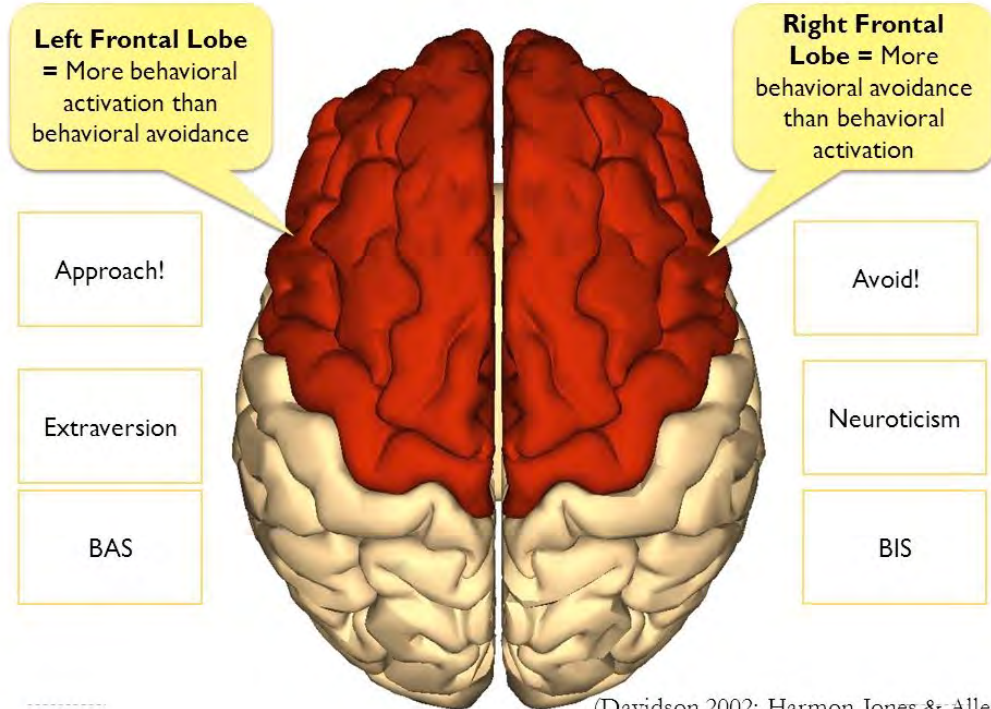
Avoid?



The most fundamental question in life:

Approach?

Avoid?



The two basic mindsets of daily life

Discover mode

Left Frontal Lobe
= More behavioral
activation than
behavioral avoidance

Approach!

Extraversion

BAS

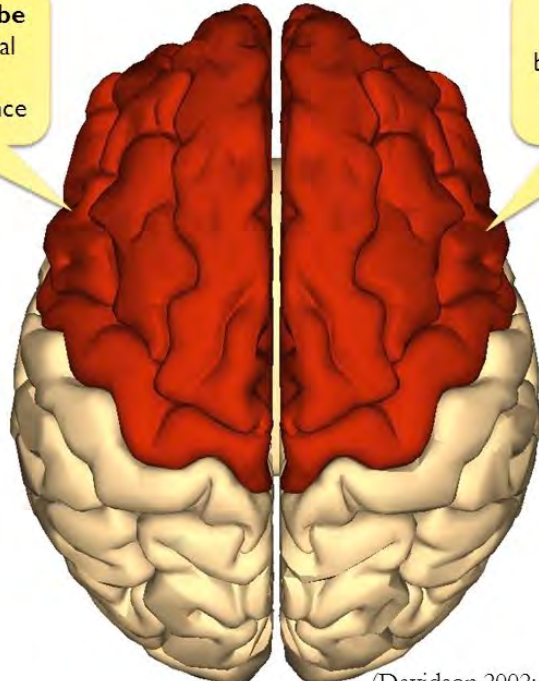
Defend mode

Right Frontal Lobe
= More
behavioral avoidance
than behavioral
activation

Avoid!

Neuroticism

BIS



The two basic mindsets of daily life

Discover mode

- Scan for opportunities
- Kid in a candy shop
- Think for yourself
- *Whoever grows the most by graduation, wins*

Defend mode

- Scan for dangers
- Scarcity mindset
- Cling to your team
- *If we defeat them, we win*

Defend mode

- Scan for dangers
- Scarcity mindset
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Shutterstock.com

Trigger Happy

The "trigger warning" has spread from blogs to college classes. Can it be stopped?

By **JENNY JARVIE** | March 3, 2014

March
2014

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

IMF's Lagarde Won't Speak at Smith, Part of a Growing List

Protests by Students, Faculty Have Derailed Several Commencement Addresses This Spring



Defend mode

- Scan for dangers
- Scarcity mindset
- Cling to your team
- *If we defeat them, we win*

May 2014

In College and Hiding From Scary Ideas

MARCH 21, 2015



Eleanor Taylor

KATHERINE BYRON, a senior at [Brown University](#) and a member of its Sexual Assault Task Force, considers it her duty to make Brown a safe place for rape victims, free from anything that might prompt memories of trauma.

So when she heard last fall that a student group had organized a debate about campus sexual assault between Jessica Valenti, the founder of [feministing.com](#), and Wendy McElroy, a libertarian, and that Ms. McElroy was likely to criticize the term “rape culture,” Ms. Byron was alarmed. “Bringing in a speaker like that could serve to invalidate people’s experiences,” she told me. It could be “damaging.”

Defend mode

- Scan for dangers
- Scarcity mindset
- Cling to your team
- *If we defeat them, we win*

Requests for “Safe Spaces”

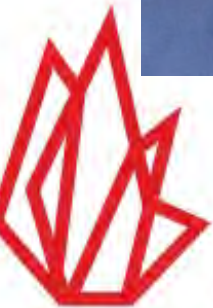
A debate between two feminists could “invalidate people’s experiences...” it could be “damaging”

March 2015

Greg Lukianoff



- Serious depression in 2007
- Learned CBT in 2008
- In 2013-2014, began to see students espousing the exact cognitive distortions that he had learned to STOP doing
- Invited me to lunch in May 2014
- We submitted to *The Atlantic* in January 2015



FIRE

Foundation for Individual
Rights in Education

The Atlantic

SUBSCRIBE SEARCH MENU

August
2015



EDUCATION

The Coddling of the American Mind

In the name of emotional well-being, college students are increasingly demanding protection from words and ideas they don't like. Here's why that's disastrous for education—and mental health.

Nov. 2015

Yale Lecturer Resigns After Email on Halloween Costumes



By Anemona Hartocollis



Feb 2017



BREAKING NEWS

PROTEST AT UC BERKELEY OVER ALT-RIGHT SPEAKER



Columbia students storm classroom to harass Title IX admin



Toni Airaksinen

New York Campus Corres

@Toni_Airaksinen

on Oct 08, 2017 at 1:42 PM



g on Vimeo

Oct,
2017

THE CODDLING OF THE AMERICAN MIND

HOW GOOD INTENTIONS
AND BAD IDEAS ARE
SETTING UP A GENERATION
FOR FAILURE

GREG LUKIANOFF
JONATHAN HAIDT



Removing portraits — a mistaken approach to promoting diversity in medicine

By Jeffrey S. Flier Updated June 19, 2019, 1:39 p.m.

✉️ 🌐 🐦 🖨️ 💬 172



Portraits in the Louis Bornstein Family Amphitheater were removed to promote diversity. They have not been replaced. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

A Medical Student Questioned Microaggressions. UVA Branded Him a Threat and Banished Him from Campus.

Kieran Bhattacharya's First Amendment lawsuit can proceed, a court said.

ROBBY SOAVE | 4.7.2021 2:30 PM



(Mark Lagola)

WHAT: The sudden emergence of a new moral culture of “safetyism” around 2014

- Safe spaces
 - Trigger warnings
 - Microaggressions
 - Bias response teams
 - Speech is “violence”
 - Power becomes dominant analytic lens
 - Call-out culture, often for single words
- Defend mode dominates:
Some students think they are fragile, in a dangerous and hostile university; need protection from words, books, & speakers

The Three Great Untruths

Great Untruth	<i>Psych Principle Violated</i>
<i>What doesn't kill you makes you weaker</i>	<i>Children are antifragile</i>
<i>Always trust your feelings</i>	<i>We are all prone to emotional reasoning and the confirmation bias</i>
<i>Life is a battle between good people and evil people</i>	<i>We are all prone to tribalism and dichotomous thinking</i>

Bad Idea #1



What doesn't kill you makes you weaker

Psych Principle #1: People are Anti-Fragile

*What doesn't kill me
makes me stronger.
(Friedrich Nietzsche, 1888)*





**Nassim
Nicholas
Taleb**

Author of *The Black Swan*

TOUGH TIMES DON'T LAST
TOUGH PEOPLE DO

Antifragile

Things That Gain
From Disorder

'The ultimate model to aspire to'
The Times

Systems that increase in capability, resilience, or robustness as a result of mistakes, faults, attacks, or failures.

"The resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better."

Examples:

- Bones
- The immune system
- Children



THE PEANUT ALLERGY EPIDEMIC

WHAT'S CAUSING IT AND
HOW TO STOP IT



HEATHER FRASER

Foreword by Janet Levatin, M.D.
Clinical Instructor in Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School
Copyrighted Material

Why are peanut allergies on the rise?

By Susannah Locke | @susannahlocke | Nov 6, 2014, 3:10pm EST



Randomized Trial of Peanut Consumption in Infants at Risk for Peanut Allergy



..., D.M., Peter H. Sayre, M.D., Ph.D., Henry T. Bahnson, M.P.H., Suzana
en A. Brough, M.B., B.S., Deborah Phippard, Ph.D., Monica Basting, M.A.,
Ph.D., Michelle L. Sever, M.S.P.H., Ph.D., et al., for the LEAP Study Team*

on a hypothesis that regular eating of
when started during infancy, will elicit
e instead of an allergic immune reaction.”



The NEW ENGLAND
JOURNAL of MEDICINE

2015

Randomized Trial of Peanut Consumption in Infants at Risk for Peanut Allergy

George Du Toit, M.B., B.Ch., Graham Roberts, D.M., Peter H. Sayre, M.D., Ph.D., Henry T. Bahnson, M.P.H., Suzana Radulovic, M.D., Alexandra F. Santos, M.D., Helen A. Brough, M.B., B.S., Deborah Phippard, Ph.D., Monica Basting, M.A., Mary Feeney, M.Sc., R.D., Victor Turcanu, M.D., Ph.D., Michelle L. Sever, M.S.P.H., Ph.D., et al., for the LEAP Study Team*

“The LEAP study was based on a hypothesis that regular eating of peanut-containing products, when started during infancy, will elicit a protective immune response instead of an allergic immune reaction.”

Randomly assigned 640 high risk infants (eczema or egg allergies) to consume or avoid peanuts until age 5

Results: 17% of avoiders developed peanut allergies.

Only 3% of the consumers developed an allergy.

“Our findings suggest that [the standard] advice was incorrect and may have contributed to the rise in peanut and other food allergies.”

HOW GOOD INTENTIONS
AND BAD IDEAS ARE
SETTING UP A GENERATION
FOR FAILURE



Biosphere 2: Trees grew rapidly, but fell over before reaching maturity. Why?



The designers forgot to include wind.

Trees need wind to blow against them, which causes their roots to spread out, and creates "reaction wood" (also known as "stress wood") wherever pressure is greatest from bending.

ENTITLE MANIA

How Not to Spoil Your Kids, and
What to Do if You Have



RICHARD WATTS

[Palm trees are antifragile]: Early bends cause scars, then another wind comes, and it cracks and scars some more, and as the palm tree reaches its full height the tree has cracked and scarred so many times that it can withstand category 5 winds.

What do parents do? We take our beautiful little palm tree, we pull it indoors, feed it, give it everything it needs to grow. It looks great. And then we roll it out into the wind. And the first breeze that blows, the tree cracks.

At what age were you let out?

--Allowed to walk ALONE, 6 blocks, to a store or friend's house?

--Allowed to roam around town with friends, no adult supervision?

6 = 1st grade

Born before 1982 (Gen X, Boomers...)

8 = 3rd grade

10 = 5th grade

(Millennials span the full range)

12 = 7th grade

14 = 9th grade

Born after 1995 (Gen Z)

16 = 11th grade

The Decline of Play and the Rise of Psychopathology in Children and Adolescents



PETER GRAY

2011, American Journal of Play



Too
Dangerous



Just
Right?



Too
Safe?

[He notes the remarkable increase in Man's physical well-being, then:]

The sorrows and troubles of men, it is true, may not have been materially diminished, but bodily pain and suffering, though not abolished, have been assuaged as never before...

Sorrows and griefs are companions sure sooner or later to join us on our pilgrimage, and we have become perhaps more sensitive to them, and perhaps less amenable to the old time remedies of the physicians of the soul.

--Osler, 1914, Teaching and Thinking



Prepare the child
for the road, not
the road for the
child



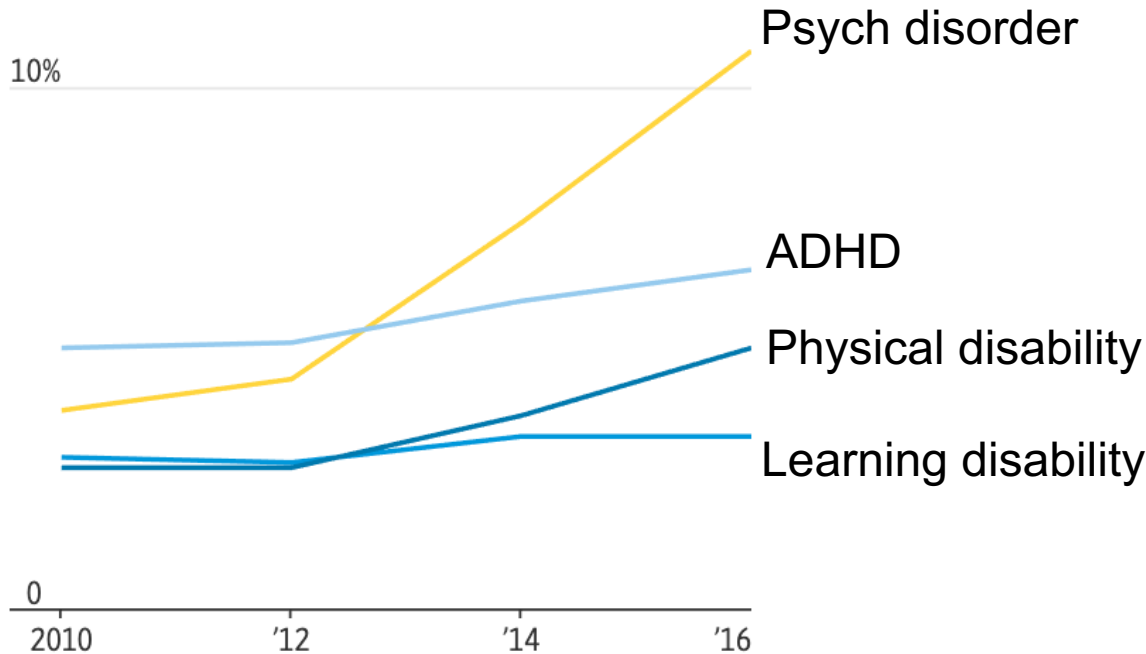
WHY 2014? The Six Causal Threads

- 1) Political polarization, with purification of the faculty
- 2) Rising anxiety and depression for Gen-Z, immersed in social media, arrives Fall 2013
- 3) Paranoid parenting in an age of rising inequality
- 4) Decline of unsupervised free play, 1990s
- 5) Growth of bureaucracy and moral dependence
- 6) Rising passion for social justice with shift to “equal outcomes” SJ, not proportional-procedural SJ

Self-described disabilities of freshmen on U.S. college campuses

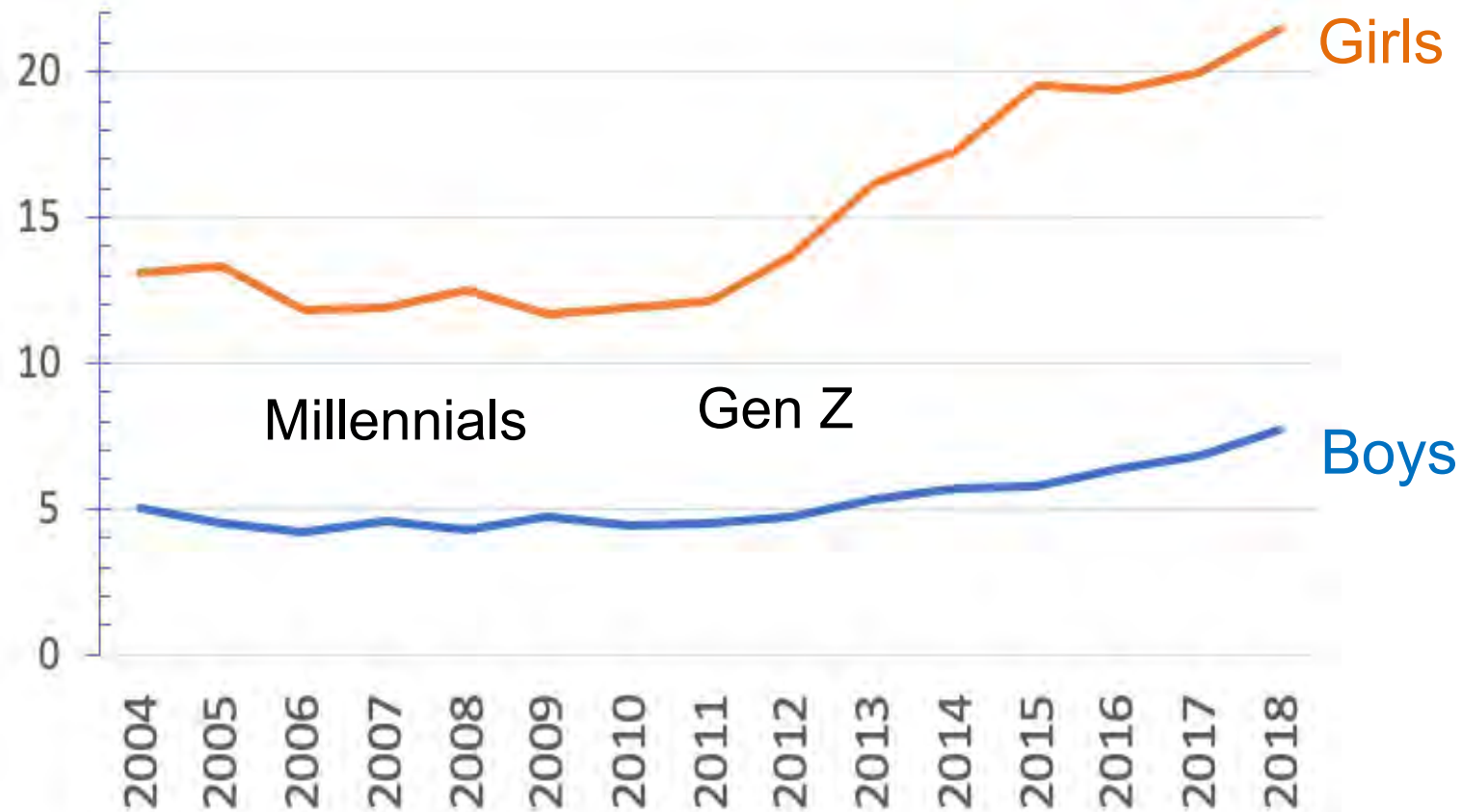
- Physical disability
- Learning disability
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- Psychological disorder

an epidemic of psychological problems



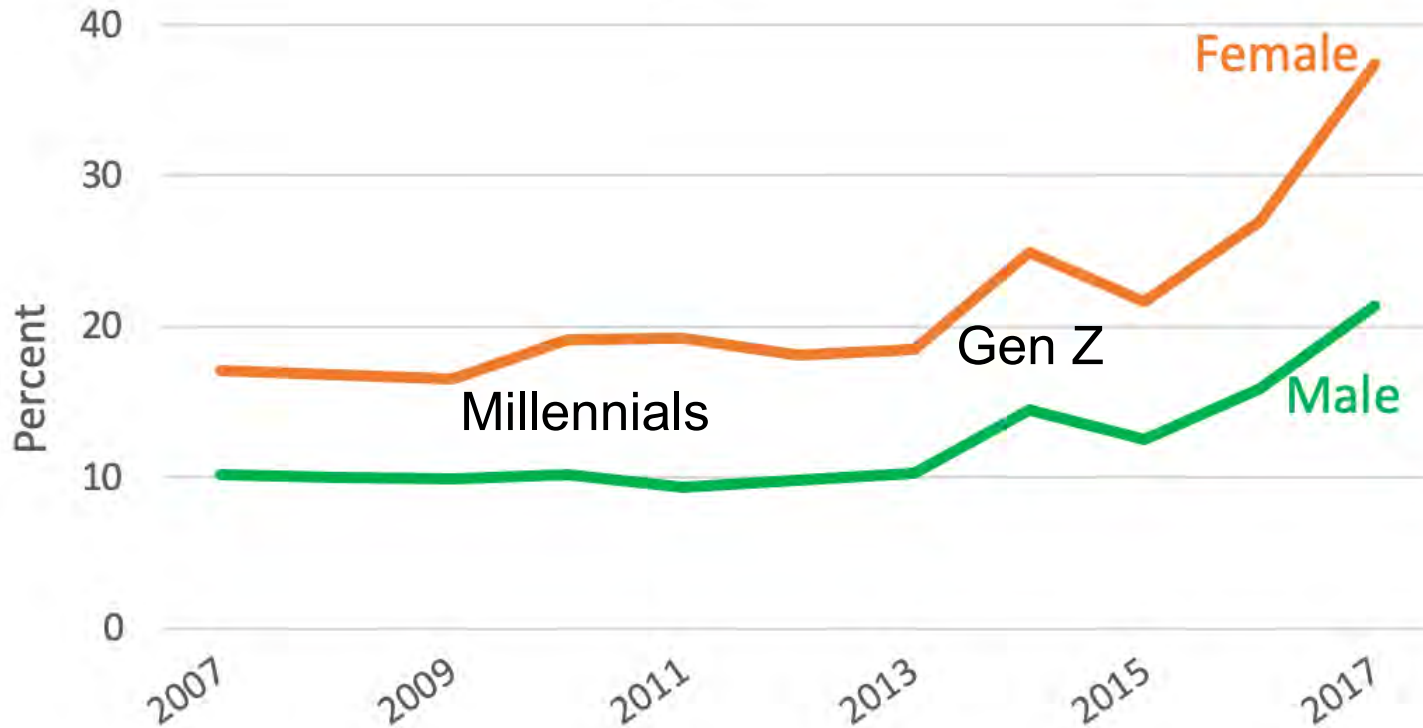
Source: UCLA's Higher
Education Research Institute

% of US Teens who had a major depression in the last year



Source: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health

US undergraduates, severe depression rate



Source: [Healthy Minds Study](#), % scoring 15 or above on the PHQ-9

Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?

Parents, therapists and schools are struggling to figure out whether helping anxious teenagers means protecting them or pushing them to face their fears.

By **BENOIT DENIZET-LEWIS** OCT. 11, 2017



Opinion

The Big Myth About Teenage Anxiety

Relax: The digital age is not wrecking your kid's brain.



By **Richard A. Friedman**

Dr. Friedman is a psychiatrist.

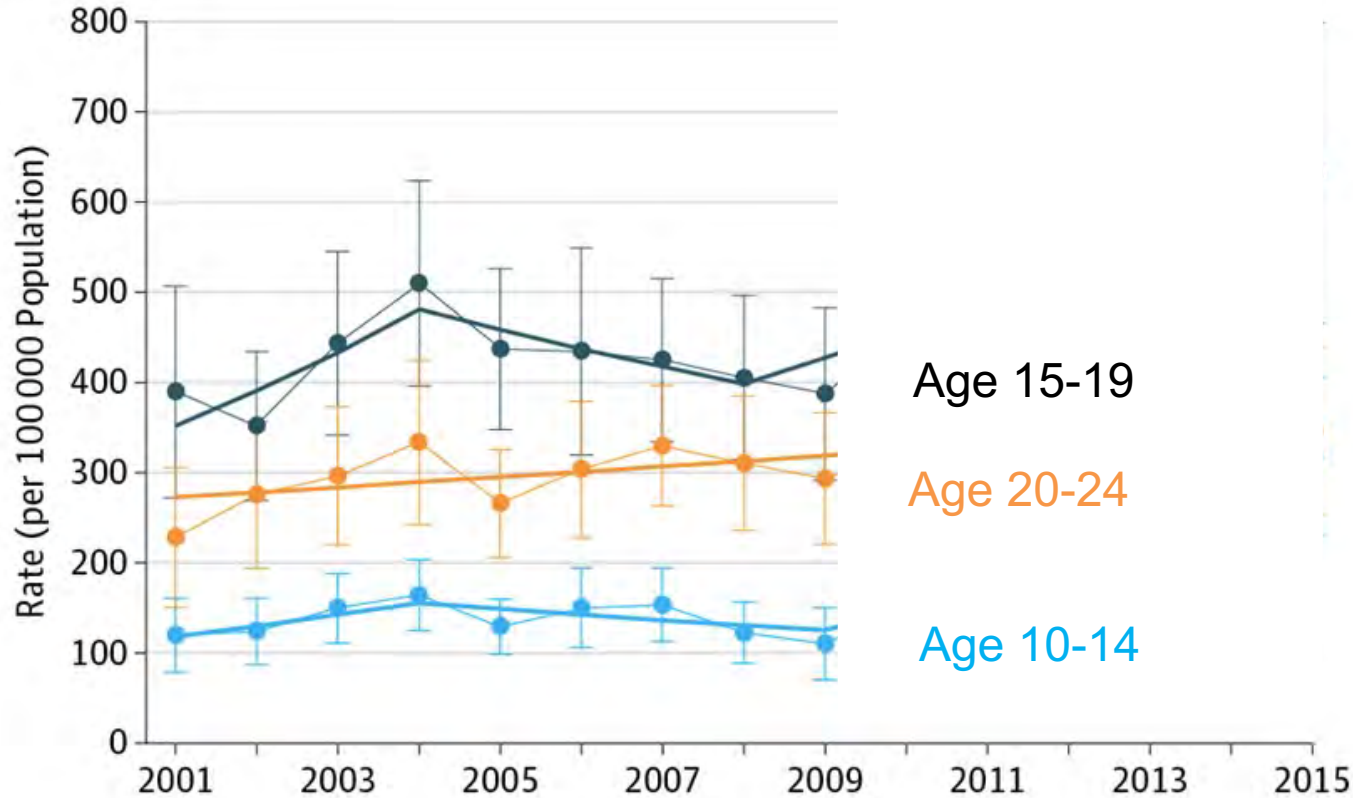
Sept. 7, 2018



408

Hospital Admissions for non-fatal self-harm: Girls

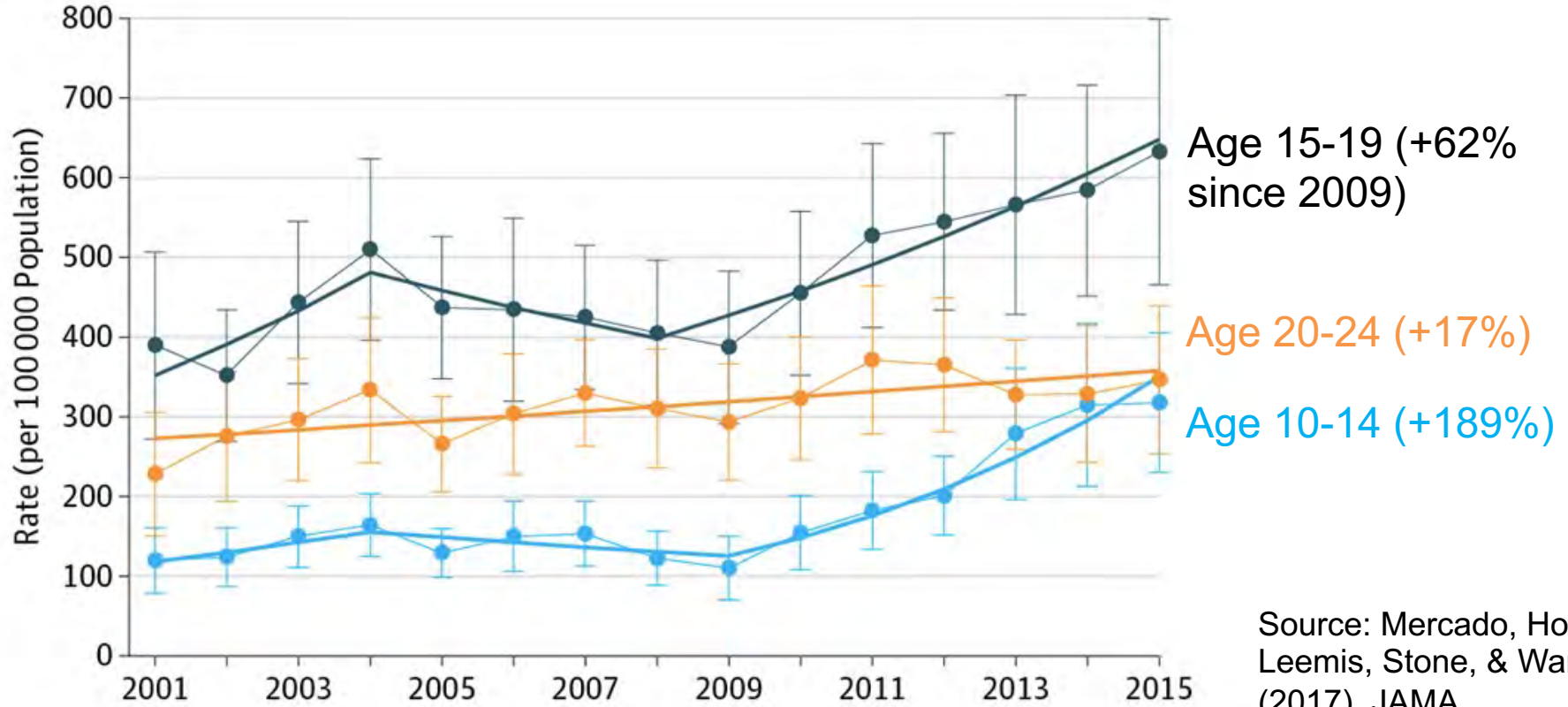
B Females



Source: Mercado, Holland, Leemis, Stone, & Wang (2017), JAMA

Hospital Admissions for non-fatal self-harm: Girls

B Females



Source: Mercado, Holland, Leemis, Stone, & Wang (2017), JAMA

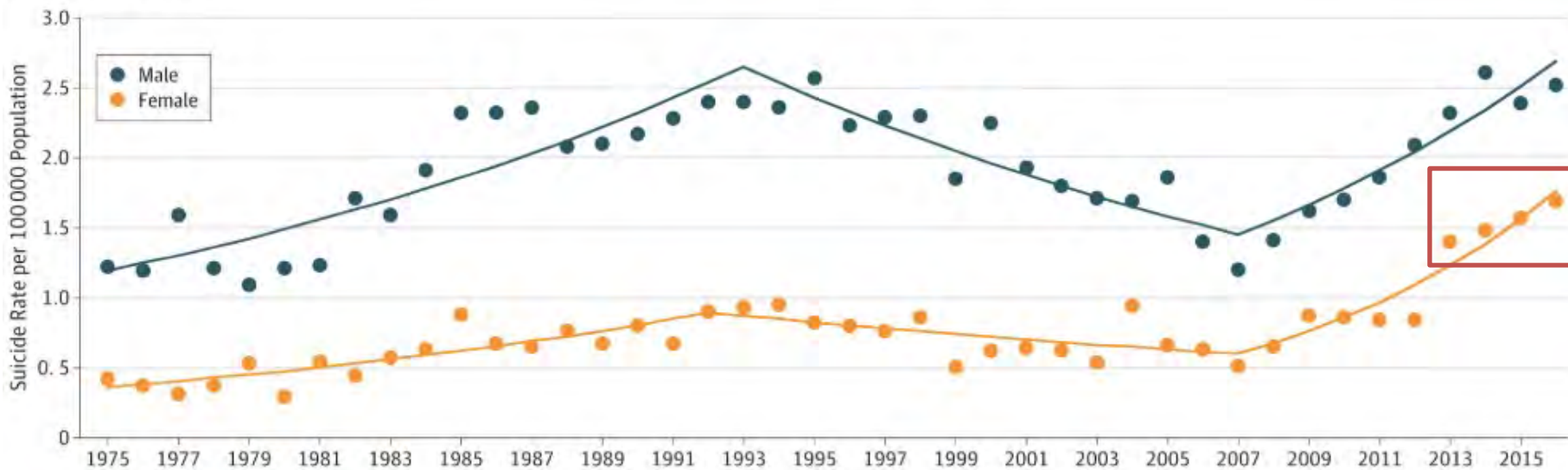
Suicide rates in girls are rising, study finds, especially in those age 10 to 14

By Dr. Edith Bracho-Sanchez, CNN

Updated 11:00 AM ET, Fri May 17, 2019

Girls' rate is up 151% compared to 2001-2010

A Age 10 to 14 y



Students Flood College Mental-Health Centers

Colleges from Ohio State to Central Florida devise more programs to triage students; detern who may be fine with some peer counseling




At Ohio State University, Tyler Hackmann, a graduate student, and Shiana Bookless, a junior, are peer counselors in the university's wellness-coaching program. They counsel students who seek help for adjustment issues. PHOTO: MADDIE MCGARVEY FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Defend mode

- Scan for dangers
- Scarcity mindset
- Cling to your team
- *If we defeat them, we win*

Oct. 2016

TheCoddling.com



International Coddling

The book is called *The Coddling of the AMERICAN mind*, but does it apply in other countries? So far, we can say with some confidence that the trends we describe in the book are spreading throughout major English speaking countries. Here is what we have found:

The UK

- We have conducted two literature reviews examining trends in the USA and UK health and social media use. You can get to them, and (if you are a researcher) [this page](#).



Australia

- [The Coddling of the Australian Mind](#)

Note: Jon will be giving talks in Melbourne July 21, and in Sydney July 25. [Details here](#)



New Zealand

- [The Coddling of the Kiwi Mind](#)

Note: Jon will be giving a talk in Auckland on August 1. [Details here](#).



Canada

- [The Coddling of the Canadian Mind](#)



The Pattern:

- 1) Starts 2012 or 2013
- 2) Limited to mood disorders
- 3) Extends to behavior
- 4) Worse for girls

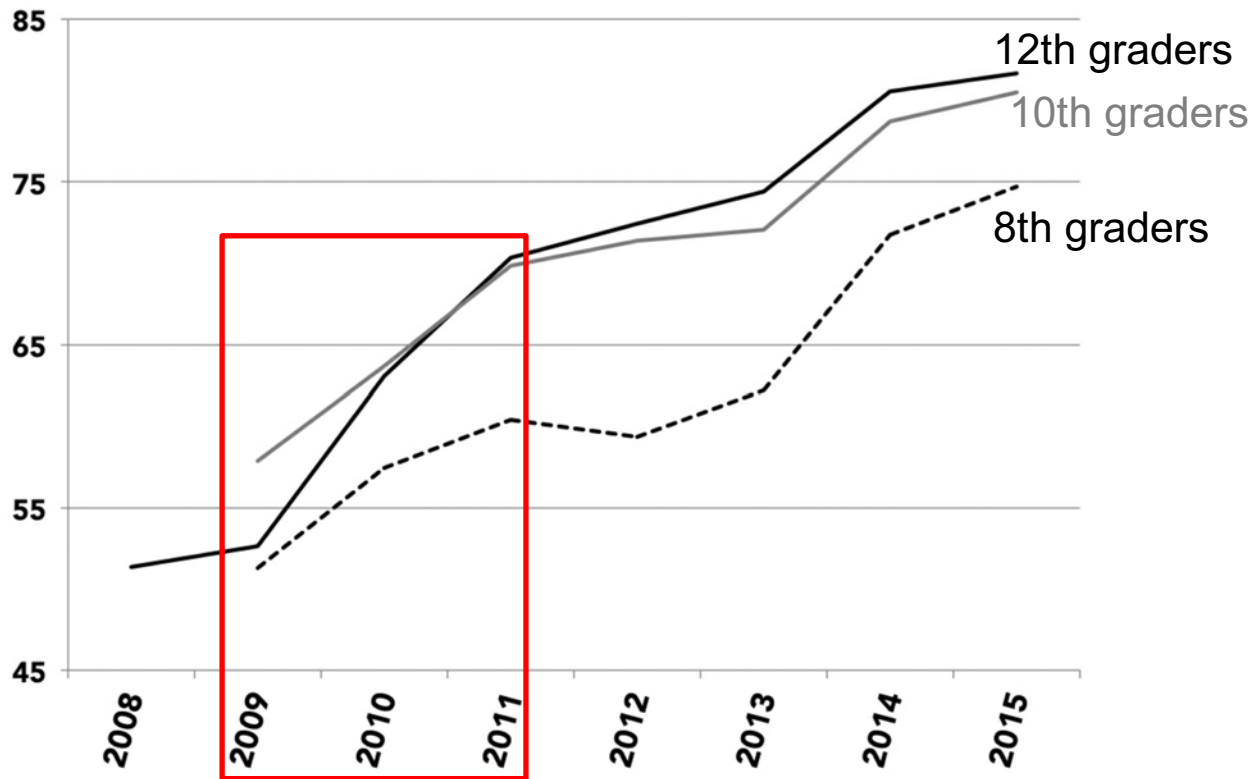
WHY ?

Why is this happening

- At the same time
- In multiple countries
- Bigger impacts on girls
- Biggest impacts on pre-teen girls

Social Media Explains the Timing

2006: FB opens to all
2007: iPhone
2009: FB adds the “Like”
button
2009-2011: Migration of
teen social life onto
social media in USA



% of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders using social networking sites almost every day.

Source: Monitoring the Future, 2008–2015, graphed by Twenge (2017).

Social Media Also Explains the Sex Difference

1. Girls use it more than boys, and talk more about emotions and depression. (Boys are gaming)
2. Girls are more affected by constant social comparison
3. Girls are more affected by FOMO and FOBLO
4. Girls' aggression/bullying is relational, boys is more physical



Bad Idea #2



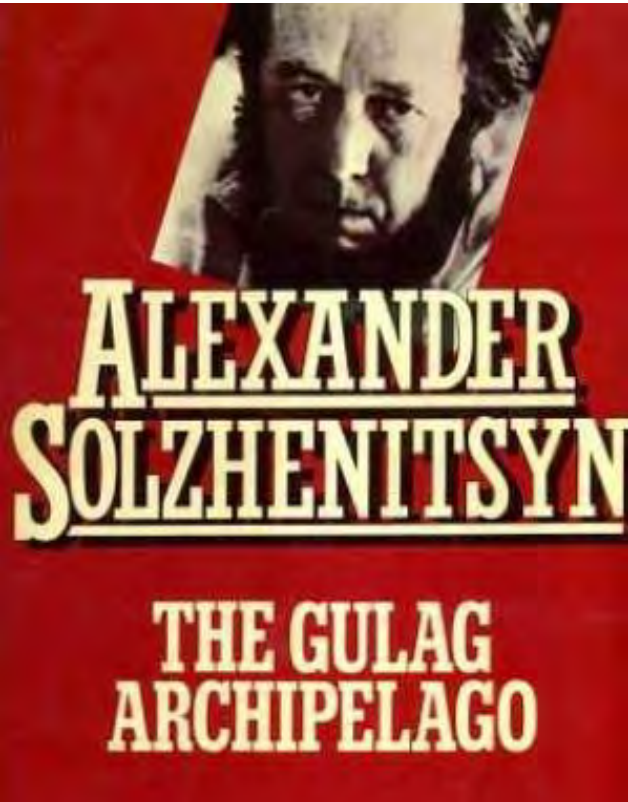
Always trust your feelings

Bad Idea #3



*Life is a battle between
good people and evil people*

Psych Principle #3: We are all prone to dichotomous thinking and tribalism



The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.



Freddie Gray



Eric Garner

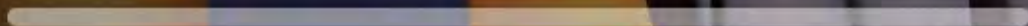


Tamir Rice



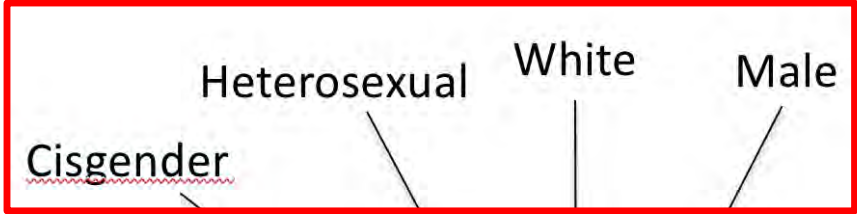
Kimberlé Crenshaw | TEDWomen 2016

The urgency of intersectionality



18:50

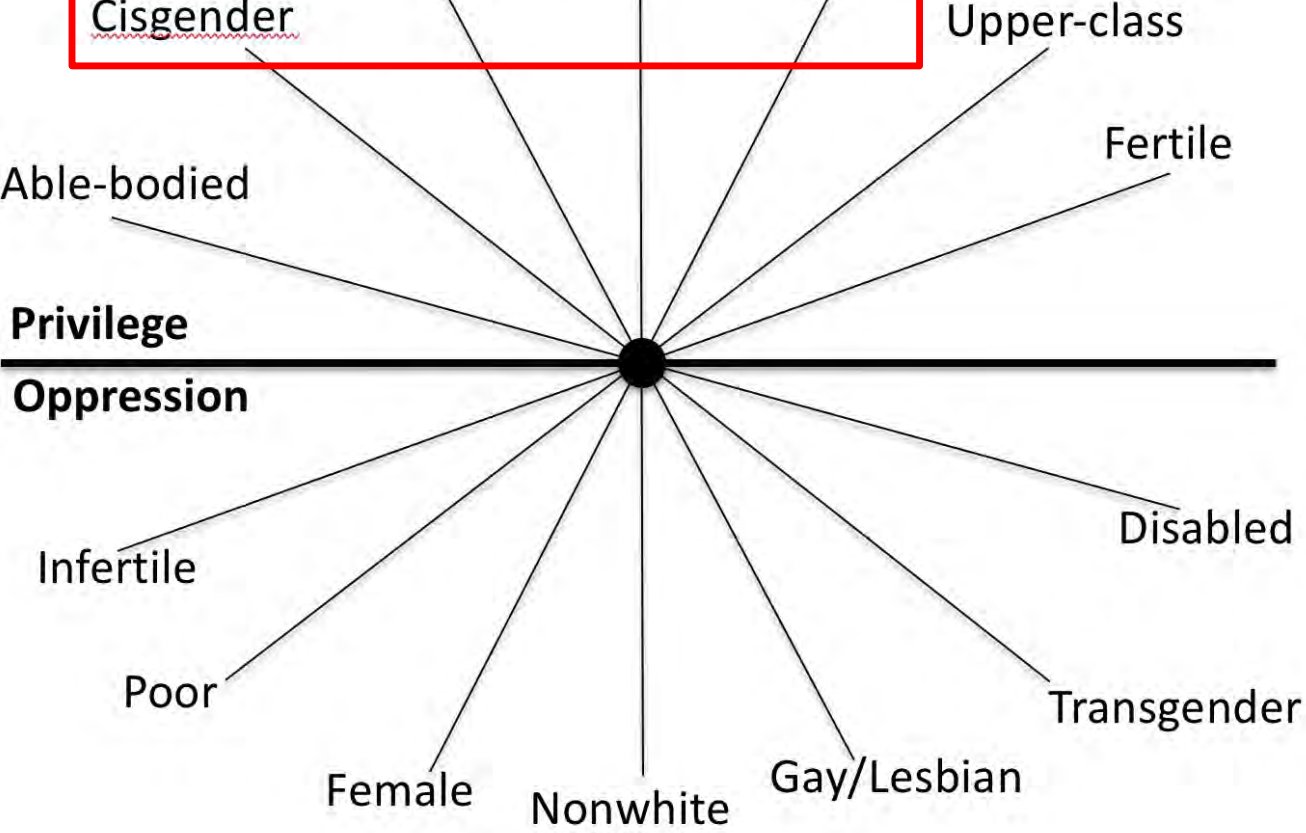




Morally
Bad

Privilege
Oppression

Morally
Good



PRIVILEGED AND OPPRESSED GROUPS IN THE U.S.

	Privileged Group	Oppressed Group
1. Gender Identity	Cisgender Men	Cisgender & Transgender Women, Transgender Men, Non-Binary, Intersex
2. Race	White	People of Color
3. Occupational Level (Self or Family)	Top/Middle Management; "Professionals"	Service, Factory, and Farm Workers, etc.
4. Socioeconomic Status (Self or Family)	Upper & Middle	Working & Lower
5. Sexuality	Heterosexual	Gay, Lesbian, Bi/Pansexual, Asexual, Demi Romantic, etc.
6. Age	28-52	Younger & Older
7. Ability	Neurotypical, No mobility or physical conditions	Physical, Psychological, or Learning Conditions
8. Educational Level (Self or Family)	College or Professional/Graduate Degree(s)	High School or Less
9. Religion/Faith	Christian	Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, Pagan, Atheist, etc.
10. Citizenship	U.S. Born	Legal Resident, Undocumented, Refugee, Migrant Worker, Temporary Visa
11. Ethnicity/Culture	Northern/Western European	Nigerian, Navajo, Iranian, Cambodian, etc.
12. Use of English	"Grammatically Correct", No Perceivable Accent	English as a Foreign Language, Accented English, "Slang"
13. Size/Appearance	"Average height and weight", Mainstream beauty standards	Non-conforming to mainstream beauty standards
14. Relationship or Family Status (Self or Family)	Legally Married, Heterosexual Relationship; Monogamous; Two Parent/Nuclear Family	Single Parent, Divorced, Independent, Queer Parents, Polyamorous; Extended Clan, etc.
15. Gender Expression	Traditional masculinity/femininity; Conforming to gender binary	Gender queer, Gender variant, nontraditional gender roles, etc.
16. Educational Access	College counseling and support, resources and opportunities	Limited knowledge of college-going process, lack of school funding

Leadership training handout
Ivy League college, 2019

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8. Educational Level (Self or	College or Professional/Graduate	High School or Less

THIS SPACE IS ONLY FOR

STUDENTS OF COLOR DO NOT HAVE SAFE SPACE ON THIS CAMPUS—THE SOCIAL JUSTICE HUB IS THE CLOSEST THING. PLEASE RESPECT THE PURPOSE OF HUB. THIS IS NOT A STUDY HALL. THIS IS NOT AN AUDIUM STUDIO. THIS IS AN ORGANIZING SPACE TO RESIST OPPRESSION AND BUILD COMMUNITY.

- Indigenous, People of Color & Queer Empowerment
- Resisting Oppression
- Social Justice Organizing

THIS SPACE IS NOT FOR

- Non-Indigenous People, Non-People of Color, & Non-Queer People
- Faculty & Administrative Meetings
- Projects Unrelated to Social Justice

IF YOUR WORK BELONGS TO CENTER POC + QUEER PLEASE TAKE IT ELSEWHERE.

Common Enemy Identity Politics At The New School 2017

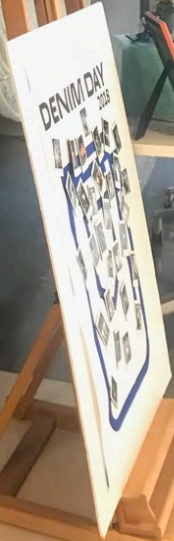
a space for
everyone except
straight whites

WHO IS THIS SPACE FOR?

THIS SPACE WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY BLACK QUEER STUDENT ORGANIZING. WE TRUST YOU WITH YOUR WORD AND THE MISSION OF THIS SPACE HAS BEEN FULFILLED. WE REMIND YOU THAT THE SOCIAL JUSTICE HUB IS FOR PEOPLE WHO IDENTIFY AS...

BLACK
LATINX
INDIGENOUS
ASIAN
PACIFIC ISLANDER
LESBIAN
GAY
BISEXUAL
TRANSGENDER
QUEER
INTERSEX
ASEXUAL
GENDER NON CONFORMING

IF YOUR WORK BELONGS TO CENTER POC + QUEER PLEASE TAKE IT ELSEWHERE.



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Defend mode

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

**HOW TO
BE AN
ANTIRACIST**

IBRAM X.

KENDI

NATIONAL BOOK AWARD-WINNING
AUTHOR OF
STAMPED FROM THE BEGINNING



**WHITE
FRAGILITY**

WHY IT'S SO HARD

FOR WHITE PEOPLE TO

TALK ABOUT RACISM

ROBIN DIANGELO



Common Humanity Identity Politics



Pauli Murray, 1946

I intend to destroy segregation by positive and embracing methods... When my brothers try to draw a circle to exclude me, I shall draw a larger circle to include them. Where they speak out for the privileges of a puny group, I shall shout for the rights of all mankind

Bonus: Reducing moralism produces more effective and humane activism.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR
(1929-1968)

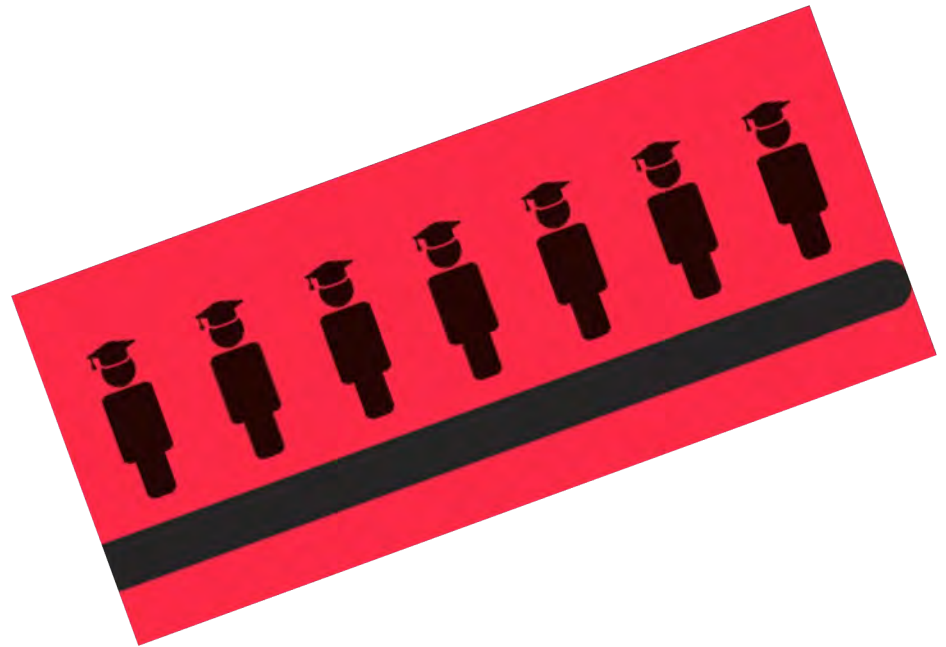
**I have
decided to
stick with love.
Hate is too great
a burden to bear.**

InspirationalBoost.com



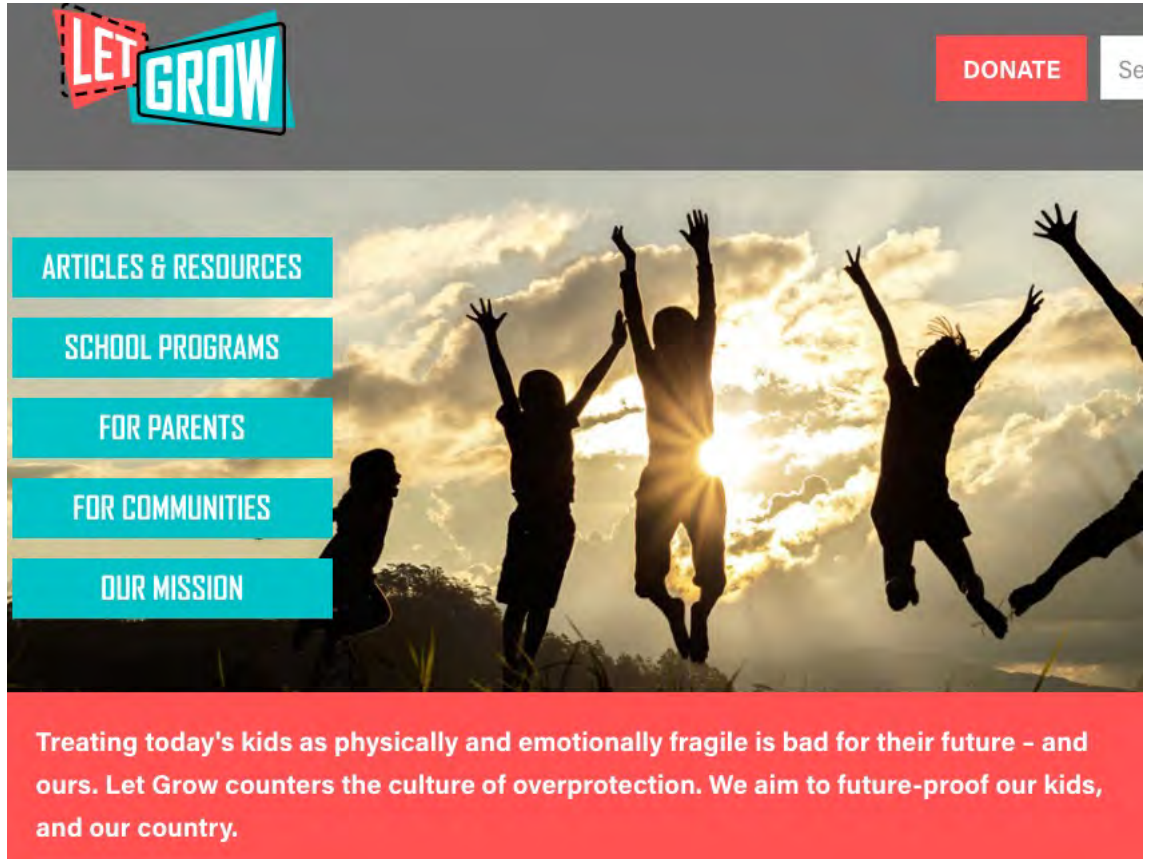
What now?

How to set up Gen Z for success



1) If you are a parent, or work with kids:

Visit and support
LetGrow.org



LET GROW

[DONATE](#)

- [ARTICLES & RESOURCES](#)
- [SCHOOL PROGRAMS](#)
- [FOR PARENTS](#)
- [FOR COMMUNITIES](#)
- [OUR MISSION](#)

Treating today's kids as physically and emotionally fragile is bad for their future - and ours. Let Grow counters the culture of overprotection. We aim to future-proof our kids, and our country.

Applying Antifragility as a Parent

- Short term stress is essential (“stress wood”). It’s only chronic stress that is bad.
- Give your children a “secure base” but then don’t shelter them from routine stress, failure, bad news.
- Supervise less during lockdown.
- Visit [LetGrow.org](https://www.letgrow.org), do the LetGrow project.

2) If you are a professor or administrator

A) Talk about antifragility; don't validate "emotional" safety

"Learning is the antithesis of comfort... The collision of views and ideologies is in the DNA of the academic enterprise. We do not need any collision avoidance technology here."

--Ruth Simmons, Pres. Brown U



B) Use OpenMind: OpenMindPlatform.org



[How it Works](#) ▾ [Use OpenMind](#) ▾ [Library](#) ▾ [About Us](#) ▾ [Donate](#)

OpenMind

A free interactive platform designed to depolarize communities and foster mutual understanding across differences

To get started, click below:

[USE OPENMIND](#)

Content Overview

1

Why talk to people you disagree with:

Discover how talking to people you disagree with can help you make wiser decisions and new discoveries.

2

Cultivate intellectual humility:

Learn how cultivating a mindset of humility and open-mindedness can help you achieve academic, professional, and personal success.

3

Explore the irrational mind:

Learn a little bit of psychology to see the tricks the mind plays on us, making us all prone to be self-righteous, overconfident, and quick to demonize “the other side.”

4

Break free from your moral matrix:

Uncover the power of the “moral matrix,” which helps explain where our differences come from and why disagreements can be so intractable.

5

Prepare for constructive disagreement:

Learn practical skills to turn the most difficult disagreements into productive conversations.

The river of information: What comes into teens' eyes and ears?



Exclusive: Nearly half of parents worry their child is addicted to mobile devices

Briett Molina, USA TODAY | Published 9:59 a.m. ET Feb. 22, 2018 | Updated 5:28 p.m. ET Feb. 23, 2018

The river of information: What comes into teens' eyes and ears?

New info

--Less than a week old

Middle-aged info

--10-50 years

--Parents and grandparents

Classic info

--more than 100 years

--Cultural inheritance

1890s



The river of information: What comes into teens' eyes and ears?

New info

- Less than a week old
- Mostly **adult-created**

Middle-aged info

- 10-50 years
- Parents and grandparents

Classic info

- more than 100 years
- Cultural inheritance

1960s



The river of information: What comes into teens' eyes and ears?

2010s

New info

- Less than a week old
- Mostly **peer created**

Middle-aged info

- 10-50 years
- Parents and grandparents

Classic info

- more than 100 years
- Cultural inheritance



Wisdom Deprivation Disorder?

New info

- Less than a week old
- Mostly **peer created**

Middle-aged info

- 10-50 years
- Parents and grandparents

2010s



*“We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of **the general bank and capital of nations and of ages.**”* Edmund Burke (1790)



The Coddling of the American Mind:

Implications for mental health, and for the medical profession



Jonathan Haidt, NYU-Stern

American Osler Society

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