



activists
deficit

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DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- At the beginning of the video, Mr. Rubin contends: "...there's a mass affliction spreading throughout the Western world. It's called 'the bravery deficit.'" People, good people like you, are afraid to say what they think." Why do you think that so many people are afraid to express their opinions and thoughts, especially in the U.S.—a country renowned for its protected right to freedom of expression? Why do you think that this problem is spreading in the Western world? Explain.
- After Mr. Rubin gives some examples of the left categorizing and name-calling those who oppose their viewpoints, he points out: "Take the 'wrong' side of a hot-button issue and your reputation, your friends, and your job can all be lost in an instant. You will likely never get a chance to confront your accusers, most of whom are anonymous. And, you may feel forced to issue a faux apology to save yourself. (Which, by the way, it usually won't.) The understandable temptation is to think that this politically correct madness will soon end. Just die out on its own. Well, it won't." Why might the consequences for opposing leftist ideology often be so severe? Explain. Do you agree with Mr. Rubin that political correctness and the resulting extreme, absurd outcomes from it won't ever diminish or go away on its own? Why or why not?
- Mr. Rubin goes on to share with us that, "The point is, perhaps your most important job as a human being is to stand up for the things you believe in. Don't take the path of least resistance. Be better than those who would silence you, deplatform you, and mob you. How? Just...stop...being...afraid." Do you agree with the notion that your most important duty as a human is to stand up for your beliefs? Why or why not? What do you think Mr. Rubin means when he implores you to 'be better' than those who try to silence, belittle, or disempower you? Explain.
- Towards the end of the video, Mr. Rubin explains: "The mob depends on the fact that everyone is scared to say what they think. Don't give them that power. All of the successes of America, and the Western values that gave birth to America, are being eroded as we speak. We can't just blame Hollywood, the media, and the political establishment any longer." In what ways, specifically, are American values being eroded? Explain. Do you agree with Mr. Rubin that the majority of average, non-leftists are responsible for upholding American values through their being brave enough to express their own views without fear of consequences? Why or why not?
- At the end of the video, Mr. Rubin concludes: "It's time to look in the mirror...It's time to come out of the closet—the political one. You are the solution to the bravery deficit. So what are you waiting for?" Why do you think that Mr. Rubin identifies now in particular as the time for non-leftists to stand up for their beliefs and to not allow themselves to be bullied by the left anymore? In what ways, specifically, can non-leftists eliminate the bravery deficit and be the solution? Explain.

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: UNC undergrads

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “Evidence That Conservative Students Really Do Self-Censor,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What do the ‘scores of incidents’ on college campuses (cited by the author) undermine, in terms of free speech? Who did the UNC professors survey last spring, and why? What did they seek to understand? How many undergraduates are enrolled at UNC? Who do students worry about censure from? Students from which political perspective engages in self-censorship? Which percentage of moderates reported having kept an opinion to his or herself, even though it was related to the class? What does the refutation of a ‘wrong’ view allow both sides of an issue to do, according to the authoring professors? What did a substantial portion of the survey respondents fear in regards to sharing their views in class? What percentage of moderates said that they hear “disrespectful, inappropriate, or offensive comments” about conservatives at least several times a semester? What did the authoring professors urge as a remedy to the problem of Conservative students facing troubles for expressing their viewpoints?
- In what ways, specifically, does the condition of Conservative students ‘self-censoring’ their opinions diminish and devalue the college experience for all students? Explain. Do you agree that colleges in particular should be places where it is ‘safe’ to express differing ideas and opinions in the context of searching for meaning and truth? Why or why not? What problems arise from ‘picking on’ and disenfranchising one particular ideological group, in this case Conservatives- especially on college campuses? Do you think that non-leftist UNC undergrads should close the bravery deficit? Why or why not?
- Do you think it is hypocritical for leftists to claim to be tolerant, but then for those leftists to disparage opposing viewpoints? Why or why not? Do you think it is a cop-out for Leftists to declare any opposing views as ‘hate speech?’ Why or why not? Besides college students, what other groups of non-leftists should be voicing their own views freely, and through which mediums should they be doing it? What do you think could and should be done to empower non-leftists to express their ideas freely and without consequence? Explain.



QUIZ

THE BRAVERY DEFICIT

1. The United States of America is the _____ country in the history of the world.
 - a. largest
 - b. freest
 - c. poorest
 - d. healthiest

2. What could all be lost in an instant if one takes the 'wrong' side of a hot-button issue?
 - a. one's reputation
 - b. one's friends
 - c. one's job
 - d. all of the above

3. Big Tech with its control of search algorithms, its shadowbanning, and deboosting supports political correctness and the resulting limitations of freedom.
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. What is perhaps one's most important job as a human being?
 - a. to take the path of least resistance
 - b. to always support the majority
 - c. to stand up for the things one believes in
 - d. to have the courage to silence those who disagree

5. _____ the solution to the bravery deficit.
 - a. The media is
 - b. Educational institutions are
 - c. The political establishment is
 - d. You are



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<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/02/evidence-conservative-students-really-do-self-censor/606559/>

Evidence That Conservative Students Really Do Self-Censor

Is free speech imperiled on American college campuses?

February 16, 2020

Conor Friedersdorf
Staff writer at *The Atlantic*



AFP Contributor / Getty

I've argued before that campus speech is threatened from a dozen directions, citing scores of incidents that undermine the culture of free expression and dialogue needed to seek truth and learn.

The academic Jeffrey Adam Sachs has staked out a contrasting position at the Niskanen Center. A small number of anecdotes "have been permitted to set the terms of public debate," he once wrote. He has also argued that "rather than collapsing into chaos, 2018 was a year of relative quiet on campuses. There were fewer deplatformings, fewer fired professors, and less violence compared to 2017. There was also more dialogue, greater respect for faculty free speech rights, and increased tolerance on both the right and the left."

Sachs and I watched the same controversies unfold on various campuses and drew very different conclusions about their implications for campus life.

Now there's new evidence in the debate.

Last spring, three professors at the University of North Carolina surveyed undergraduates to get a sense of the campus climate. Rather than focus on discrete controversies, such as the time in 2015 when UNC student protesters seized control of a room where a journalist was speaking, or the time in 2019 when a UNC student assaulted a sign-carrying anti-abortion activist, they sought to understand day-to-day undergraduate experiences. The results of the survey, distilled from more than 1,000 responses to email questionnaires, can't be applied to every college in America, but the findings do illuminate what's happening at a highly selective public institution in a swing state, where more than 20,000 undergraduates are enrolled.

The good news: In classes where politics comes up, large majorities of self-identified liberal and conservative students say that instructors encourage participation from both sides and want to learn from different perspectives, suggesting that concerns about faculty-indoctrination efforts are unfounded. Indeed, students reported that they worry less about censure from faculty than from peers.

That brings us to the bad news:

- While majorities favor more viewpoint diversity and free-speech norms, an intolerant faction of roughly a quarter of students believe it is okay to silence or suppress some widely held views that they deem wrong.
- Students across political perspectives engage in classroom self-censorship.
- Students harbor divisive stereotypes about classmates with different beliefs, and a substantial minority are not open to engaging socially with classmates who don't share their views.
- Disparaging comments about political conservatives are common.

To measure student tolerance for views with which they disagree, the researchers chose matters of ongoing controversy on campus—the fate of a Confederate statue, affirmative action in admissions, immigration, health care, climate change, and whether Christian bakers should be compelled to make cakes for gay weddings against their will—and presented students with mainstream positions that a liberal or conservative classmate might hold. Respondents were asked to indicate which among those positions they found most objectionable.

Next they were asked: If confronted with that view they identified as most objectionable, how appropriate would it be to take a series of actions, such as asking a tough question, publishing a dissent, or more extreme measures? An alarming 25.5 percent of survey respondents said it would be appropriate to “create an obstruction, such that a campus speaker endorsing this idea could not address an audience.” This authoritarian view was held by about 19 percent of self-identifying liberals, 3 percent of moderates, and 3 percent of conservatives. More than 3 percent of liberals and 1 percent of conservatives thought it would be appropriate to “yell profanity at a student” for endorsing the objectionable idea.

Also troubling were the undergraduates who reported having kept an opinion to themselves in the classroom, even though the opinion was related to the class, because they were worried about the potential consequences of expressing it. Almost 68 percent of conservatives censored themselves in this way, along with roughly 49 percent of moderates and 24 percent of liberals.

Expressing unpopular views “can reveal critical blind spots in prevailing thought patterns,” the authors of the report note, and even when a view is wrong, its refutation allows both parties “to better apprehend why the correct view must be true.” But “a substantial proportion of respondents fear social sanction, or even outright grading penalties, for sharing their views.” What's more, almost a quarter of conservative students reported being more than slightly concerned that peers would *file a complaint against them* for speech related to a class they are in together.

The report provides strong confirmation that conservatives face a hostile campus.

Among students who self-identify as liberals, some 10 percent said they hear “disrespectful, inappropriate, or offensive comments” about foreign students at least several times a semester, 14 percent said they hear disparaging comments about Muslims, 20 percent said they hear such comments about African Americans, 20 percent said they hear such comments about Christians, 21 percent said they hear such comments about LGBTQ individuals, and 57 percent said they hear such comments about conservatives. Among moderates, 68 percent said that they hear “disrespectful, inappropriate, or offensive comments” about conservatives at least several times a semester.

Out conservatives may face social isolation. Roughly 92 percent of conservatives said they would be friends with a liberal, and just 3 percent said that they would not have a liberal friend. Among liberals, however, almost a quarter said they would not have a conservative friend. Would UNC be a better place without conservatives? About 22 percent of liberals said yes. Would it be a better place without liberals? Almost 15 percent of conservatives thought so.

“Self-identified conservative students do in fact face distinct challenges related to viewpoint expression at UNC,” the authors conclude. They urge “a conversation about how the campus can become more accepting of conservative students as well as more willing to hear and engage with conservative ideas.” After all, they ask, “who would dispute that universities should be places where each idea is considered on its own terms, and not prejudged? Where sincerely held conclusions can be offered up for vigorous and civil contestation? Where students are assumed to be arguing in good faith and where they feel valued and respected, even should they turn out to be wrong?”

As important, the authors correctly emphasize that “the wrong way to interpret our report would be to see it as pitting liberals against conservatives,” not only because many liberals and moderates harbor similar anxieties about sharing earnest views, but also because even though “political hostility emerges disproportionately from the political left at UNC,” that hostility comes from a minority, not a majority, of liberals. Tolerant students belong to a cross-ideological majority. While divided in their politics, both are ill-served by the minority faction of intolerant censors.

Self-censorship is among several significant reasons to believe that free speech remains under threat on American campuses, harming undergraduate education. I try to avoid talk of “crisis,” because I believe that free speech is perpetually threatened and requires constant vigilance to sustain. But however we label the status quo, America’s professors ought to be aware of these problems.

The UNC study’s authors warn that well-intentioned instructors:

could easily fail to perceive important free-expression issues that might not be immediately evident in their courses. Student concerns about expressing political views are quite prevalent, and a common coping mechanism is to withdraw and self-censor. Thus, a classroom silence that an instructor might perceive as tacit agreement (or perhaps lackadaisical indifference) might, at least for some students, actually come from apprehension about the consequences of expressing specific viewpoints.

Thus they counsel that UNC instructors should be more intentional and explicit about their approach to free expression, so that students unaware of faculty support for it are better informed. Perhaps UNC is somehow anomalous. But its size, its student profile, and my years of reporting on different campuses lead me to suspect that it is somewhat representative of the selective colleges whose students wield disproportionate influence across society after graduation.

Free-speech advocates have had success in recent years in making the case for free-speech norms, reforming speech codes, protecting events, and reducing the number of disinvited speakers. More studies can help these advocates identify which campuses are in particular need of their attention, and assist them in empowering tolerant students in their conflicts with intolerant classmates.

We want to hear what you think about this article. Submit a letter to the editor or write to letters@theatlantic.com.



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