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The Cocktail Party Contrarian: The Insanity of the Mental Health Meme

‘Mental health’ shouldn’t be a perk-producing meme, and those who use it that way shouldn’t be encouraged.



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“You have to love Brown,” a woman whispered to me, with a wry smile. “My daughter just got an extension on a paper. She claimed ‘mental health’ issues,” the woman explained, making air quotes. “All the kids are doing it.”

She stared at me for a second and then assured me that her child is totally fine — but why should everyone else have the advantage, right? Exactly right, I thought, considering all the kids in high school who don’t have ADHD but do get extra time on their exams.

Diagnoses, and distributions, for all, I say.

Covid lockdowns have in fact produced a spike in mental health concerns among young people. We all should be extra sensitive to this pandemic, one brought about by those who initiated it while claiming to protect us from the other pandemic. According to an Active Minds survey in April 2020, a full 80 percent of college students say Covid-19 has negatively affected their mental health, citing stress and anxiety, sadness, and loneliness among their

main concerns. According to the CDC, approximately one in four 18- to 24-year-olds surveyed in 2020 had considered suicide. There is no doubt this is a serious matter.

However, as with so many serious matters these days, the trip from serious to absurd is a short one. We all know that handing out “mental health extensions” to any college kid with a deadline and a worried look on his face tells us more about the mental fitness of school faculty than it does its students. Professors, suffering from PTSD after the “canceling” of many of their colleagues for so-called infractions made up in the minds of emboldened students with no boundaries, are capitulating to demands that would normally be shamed and then dismissed.

One can hardly blame them. On American campuses today there are protected classes of social issues for which *reductio ad absurdum* has lost all meaning, especially when students have found ways to benefit from them. To dismiss any claim of compromised mental health is to dismiss them all, *obviously*. So, I guess now it's "believe all kids." A student at Dartmouth claimed it is "pretty easy" to get an extension on anything just by saying you are "overwhelmed." As more students take advantage of the opportunity dangled in front of them, the ethical line continues to move, dragging with it our collective common sense and perhaps, dangerously, an ability to attend to kids who have legitimate challenges.

"Mental health" shouldn't be a perk-producing meme, and those who use it that way shouldn't be encouraged. They should be met with the colloquial and now politically incorrect admonition to "man-up" a bit, even during a pandemic. As for the adults in the room, it is a dereliction of duty to tell young people that every uncomfortable emotion they have requires accommodation and then send them out into a world that will accommodate

almost none of them.

All of life can be interpreted as one giant mental health challenge. The best thing universities can do for their otherwise healthy students is teach them to cope, not cop out.



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