

## **Education's Worst Nightmare? The Safe Space. The Safe Space's Worst Nightmare? Logic**

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*"I've heard of some college campuses where they don't want to have a guest speaker who is too conservative, or they don't want to read a book if it had language that is offensive to African Americans or somehow sends a demeaning signal towards women... Anybody who comes to speak to you and you disagree with, you should have an argument with them, but you shouldn't silence them by saying you can't come because I'm too sensitive to hear what you have to say."*

-President Barack Obama, talk at North High School, 2015

Would it be too radical if I said that those who demand safe spaces don't belong in our educational institutions? Maybe, but let's not jump to conclusions. What I do propose to do in this article is to look first at our educational institutions and then at "safe spaces". What are they? What are they not? What is their purpose and, perhaps more significantly, how does the dynamic between the two work out?

Education is the acquisition of knowledge. According to The Oxford English Dictionary, education is "Information about or training in a particular subject." The bottom line? When we walk into classrooms, whether that's kindergarten or a university lecture hall, we expect to learn something. What's more, we don't merely expect to have a body of knowledge, but through its acquisition, seek to gain the tools with which to question and analyze information. The beauty of this system is that one leaves an institution of education not only with a diverse body of knowledge, but the perspective with which to form an opinion on the issues. Reading the first seven articles of the U.S. Constitution, for example, isn't just about memorizing the various institutions of government and their roles, but to understand federalism and the separation of powers that play a critical role in our democracy; having developed opinions on a wide variety of issues benefits to all of society, and is at the core of being a "good" citizen in a democratic society.

Now, what is a "safe space?" Once again, the Oxford English dictionary is a good place to start: "A place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm."

It's important to see how "safe spaces" work out in educational institutions. Let's assume that I am a communist (though really, I am not). Sitting with my comrades one day, we hear that an economic conservative will be visiting our campus, advocating his stance on economic issues. We burst in outrage and fear. This individual will surely "criticize" our stance on these issues.

And having our most central Marxist ideals barraged in front of the entire school will certainly “emotionally harm” us. Thus, we form a “safe space.” We all gather around one of our dorm-rooms or bother campus security to unlock a room for us to talk merrily about communism, free from any of the criticism our beliefs would have had we witnessed this visiting individual speak. We never learn about the other side of the issue. We never read economics textbooks (which really always argue against communism). In fact, we never even have to support our stance on anything—no one can contradict us in our safe space anyway. So we never contradict the individual, and the individual never contradicts us. Safe spaces isolate information, eliminate cross-pollination, and prevent debates from occurring.

At the end of the day, who cares about the dynamic between “safe spaces” and education? Well, as our example shows, “safe spaces” eliminate the possibility of obtaining a foundation on a diverse variety of issues. Taking part in this process and isolating segments of our institution’s student body into various groups based on certain preconceived beliefs, notions, and biases, whether on class, race, economics, etc., sends a very clear message: “Here’s my opinion, and I’m not listening to what you say,” one akin to that of an immature child in a playground, yelling: “Lalala! I can’t hear you!”

If people want to isolate themselves and retard their educational process, I suppose that is their choice. However, it isn’t something we should allow in schools. Take the following analogy: you are allowed to smoke anytime and anywhere, and that’s you’re right as a human being. But if you come to a fundraiser for lung cancer patients and light a cigarette, you are inarguably harming the purpose of that institution, and though smoking may be your right, you really don’t belong at that fundraiser.

This past month, the University of Chicago sent a clear message towards this end: “Our commitment to academic freedom means we do not support so-called ‘trigger warnings, or intellectual ‘safe spaces.’” Hopefully, this prestigious institution’s actions will be a precedent for many universities across the country, who, in the pursuit of education, will discourage their ultimate antithesis, the “safe space.”