AGAINST "SAFE SPACES"

Recently an insightful comment was made on a post in the DenFem Facebook group which, sadly, sparked no discussion (I was busy writing). Following the comment's insight, however, was a prescriptive claim about the nature of the Internet. The individual, who will no doubt be reading this – and I give you props for the good comment – said "the internet should be a free and safe space for everyone". The first part of the claim supporting a free Internet is something I obviously agree with (which is why we ought to privatize the web because of capitalism, right? *wink*), but the latter claim about it being a "safe space" is what I take issue with, hence the title of this piece. Ignoring the logistical issues with creating such a space on the public Internet, the entire concept of a "safe space" model is an inherently a poor way to organize structures such as the Internet and arguably even colleges. Using a "safe space" based model is a bad idea for a few reasons:

First is the fact that is raises too many questions which are unanswerable. Specifically, what counts as "safe"? How safe do people have to be? What if it is safe for 99% of people? Ought we exclude the 1%? Who enforces this "safe space"? Who decides on the rules? What about conflicting claims to safeness? I could obviously go on, but I think the point is made. Absent some Leviathan-esque figure handing down the answers to all these questions, we are left with a vague concept that sounds nice and cozy when we hear it, but ultimately has as much substance behind it as Berkeley believed the world did.

Second, the concept of "safe space", much less in a public setting, serves to isolate people from the social reality around them. The world is not a safe place and never will be. Sadly, one will inevitably encounter assholes and although we want to think that world is tolerant, it simply isn't and at the end of the day, all that can be done is to create survival strategies for those who are the targets of intolerance. Creating the illusion of a safe world by attempting to make the Internet, which is literally a digital manifestation of the interactions we have with people in person, into a "safe space" is only going to teach a generation of teenagers to have no defense mechanisms and to just assume that since people are nice on this idealized Internet, they must be nice in person. Instead of conditioning teenagers' blood to "literally boil with anger" and cause them to "literally shake with rage and fear" when they confront difference, we ought to teach them to be proud of themselves in the face of hostility. "Safe spaces" can be created in private or in the context of clubs of closed, tightly knit groups, but attempting to turn an unparalleled public space into a hugbox will solve exactly nothing and create a generation of crybabies.

Third and finally, the concept of a "safe space" based Internet is antithetical to the freedom the author of the comment wants because it requires a God-like moderator, or "Goderator", banning all who may threaten this nebulous concept of "safety". For those who couldn't pick up on this, that's censorship on a scale even the Chinese government couldn't achieve. Additionally, the rules that would be setup regarding what constitutes "unsafe" speech will inherently be arbitrary. Obviously direct threats would be banned, but those are legally problematic anyway. What if someone is, say, against gay marriage and is vocal about their views? Are they to be banned as well? And the situation gets even stickier, what if ensuring the "safety" of one group infringes upon the "safety" of another? The Goderator would have to pick a side thereby privileging one above the other creating an unfair balance of power and making the less privileged side feel unsafe. Finally, lest this section run too long, censoring speech in public settings will simply lead to more resentment against those groups that want the censorship. For example, why did feminists receive backlash after the campaign to "Ban Bossy"? Because people didn't like being told they couldn't say a given word. Why are countries where Holocaust denial is illegal statistically more anti-Semitic in recent years? Because the people there feel that, for better or for worse, their freedom of speech is stifled and thus they take it out on those who they see as promoting the censorship.

At the end of the day, if you want attacks on groups to stop, don't condescend and place them in a cozy little box in the corner of the room treating like they can't handle themselves – that merely creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, let the opposition speak and be offensive or mean or "unsafe" and watch them crumble under the weight of their errors the backlash they receive.

Peter "shitty writing recently" Heft; Kiblert's Intern

AGAINST "AGAINST 'SAFE SPACES'"

Yes, I am writing against a piece in the same Sheet. I am classy and patient like that. But the piece above, in addition to opening up some interesting debate on internet policy, was quite alarming to me.

First, I'd like to direct Mr. Heft to the nearest chill pill dealer. When a facebook comment of a dozen words leads to doomsday predictions of Chinese censorship, it may be time for the strong stuff – try behind Shorney.

The piece was mainly focused on refuting an argument that I don't believe was actually made. While I cannot speak to the original commenter's intention, I was skeptical of the number of logical jumps that were made. I think it's possible that "safe" was used to indicate a rarity of threats and harassment, not the absence of any opposing viewpoint or potentially uncomfortable statement. While people do sometimes claim to feel unsafe to complain about feeling judged, that doesn't mean there isn't genuine menace to be felt from things like malicious discrimination, the exploitation of personal information, or threats of violence and rape.

Likewise, the meaning of "should" seems to have been twisted and overblown, warping a statement about the way the world ought to be into a request for the policing of anything different. I think it's likely the comment didn't mean "this is the way we must all be required by force to behave" but rather "this is the way things ought to be and how we all should act." Again, it is possible that the sentence was meant the way it was taken, but this is an ongoing debate beyond a few individuals and I feel the need to defend the larger viewpoint that was so quickly dismissed as irrational.

The internet *should* be safe for everyone, the same way schools and supermarkets and dark alleys *should* be safe. Of course this won't ever perfectly match reality, but that doesn't mean it isn't valid as a statement of what the world ought to be like - the kind of statement the word "should" typically indicates - and that doesn't mean it isn't a worthy goal.

The desire for a safer internet isn't about getting rid of trolls in youtube comments and certianly not about squashing healthy debate. It is about the genuinely awful things that happen to real people. And not caring about people doing awful things because 'that's just the way the world is' only keeps the world that way. Saying "one will inevitably encounter assholes" is no excuse to be an asshole yourself. In fact, I would think it would be motivation to learn to better recognize assholes and, when they exhibit their characteristic assholery, to show them the door. In our actual "social reality," it's commonly recognized that you shouldn't stand silently by during a mugging or stay friends with a peeping tom. It should be the same on the internet. We shouldn't have to enable and endure this nonsense just because we can never eradicate evil. The claim that verbal abuse, harassment, threats, or even mere unkindness are unavoidable experiences is used widely (and successfully) to avoid taking responsibility for their presence. This needs to stop.

There is so much that we can do to make the internet safer. A call to action like that facebook comment should be responded to with enthusiasm, a drive for creative problem-solving, and thoughtful, constructive scrutiny of potential shortcomings. It worries me to see responses that look more like offhand dismissal, hysterics, or condescension.

I wonder what would happen if we had a campus where students responded to problems with curiosity, empathy, and energy more often than with derision and resignation.

Katie Landoll; Newbie Editor and somehow the voice of idealism today

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NANNY NEEDED

SLAM BAM BO BAM

THE STORY SLAM
Wednesday March 25 at 9:00pm in the Bandersnatch
Come listen to your classmates share stories from their lives on the theme "Something Nobody Knows About Me," or prepare a little something yourself for open mic time.

The first fifty people in attendance will get a free item from the 'snatch (yes this is real). Try the new s'mores shake created just for this event.

Staff "Logical Fallacy" Box
Emma "kettle logic" Reasoner, Managing Editor
Leona "Nirvana fallacy" Vander Molen, Senior Editor
Aidan "ignoratio elenchi" Cronin, Sophomore Editor
Hunter "red herring" Janness, Sophomore Editor
Katie "post hoc ergo propter hoc", Newbie Editor
Sam "hedging" Stamas, Newbie Editor
Jordan "Having an Intern" Kibler, Head Writer
Peter "Reification" Heft, Kibler's Intern

Bull's Last Word
Someone help these people with their children already