

Safe but

Safe space does not solve issues of discrimination, but discussion does

writers | Grace Lady and Alessia Boland

Sticking out like a sore thumb.
Square peg in a round hole.
The odd ball out.

We've all been there. You're way underdressed for a party. You're the youngest in a crowd of adults. You don't match everyone around you.

Imagine you can't change to look dressier.

Your heritage is painted across your body. You can't help but like girls 'that way.'

Your experiences don't disappear. Words send daggers that don't heal; they scar over. No matter what you're stuck with them. There is no escape.

The idea of safe spaces has been rapidly expanding over the last few years as a place to be free from harassment or judgment for LGBTQ individuals, ethnic minorities, and religious minorities.

For students like Hannah Gale, a junior from Clarke Central High School, her Jewish faith has been an obstacle socially. While she isn't always targeted for her religious beliefs, hearing jokes and derogatory comments still leaves lasting wounds.

"I'm Jewish, and I've been faced with a lot of anti-Semitic comments, especially since the election. But even before that it was something I had to face," she said. "I remember in math class last year people were making holocaust jokes non-stop. They weren't saying it at me, but they were saying it as if it was funny. But it wasn't. I found it really offensive."

Gale seeks refuge from these situations in her safe spaces: her temple and her newspaper production staff. She found security there especially on that

day, when she went to her publication to be with her friends and advisor.

Formal safe spaces, however, are being progressively advocated for in places of education. These safe spaces can provide calming activities like coloring, music, or just someone to talk to about the issue at hand.

"I feel that maybe in a high school [they can be implemented], because in high school you're still trying to figure yourself out," said Nation Ford junior Max Ghiranghelli. "In college, by that point, you need to start getting ready for the real world and in the real world there's not really safe spaces."

Many believe that the implementation of safe spaces in schools is unrealistic and inhibits the ability to form their own viewpoints.

Leslie Dennis, the director of the Southern Interscholastic Press Association, sees safe spaces as providing a barrier to understanding others viewpoints rather than solving the problem of ignorance or misunderstanding.

"They do a disservice to educating people and informing people about diverse issues," she said. "I think it only escalates the problem because they see that there's a huge divide when people should be more understanding and educated on what is so great about diversity."

Dennis advocates for the understanding of others' backgrounds and ideas, especially being able to speak with those of opposing views. Just this summer during a summer workshop, Dennis accidentally spurred education on the LGBTQ community when a group of students with varying backgrounds, including a trans student, were assigned to cover an LGBTQ community center.

"By the end of the week, the stereotypical white male from a conservative area was the one out there holding a rainbow flag at a protest and was like 'I'm going to take it home and talk to people in my community' because he had met a trans student," she said.



not sound

Nikèl Bussolati, an Honors English II teacher at Wando High School, uses her classroom as a place to discuss controversial issues and help students better grasp others' viewpoints.

"If you are reading something that allows you to discuss what social construction is and what it means, that allows you to talk about the difference between sex and gender," she said. "I feel like within the curriculum there is lots of space to address these issues."

Bussolati has also found that different school demographics can make it much harder to create a safe space environment within her classroom.

"I previously taught at a diverse arts magnet school. I never felt like I could not freely discuss gender identity issues within my classroom. I never felt like I couldn't discuss issues of race in the classroom there," she said. "However, at my current school I don't feel as empowered."

Bussolati agrees with Dennis that safe spaces aren't meant to be places of isolation, but rather places for safe conversation -- speaking, learning, and interacting solve issues of discrimination much more effectively.

"Safe spaces are not meant to shield people from things that may be threatening to them. Safe spaces are created to allow people to explore those things. All of those things. However, if you are within a safe space then you are not going to be able to use hate speech," Bussolati said.

But with the idea of safe spaces, the question of if that can affect an important part of people's First Amendment right: freedom of speech. Eliminating more rash or controversial language from conversation can be seen as a form of censorship.

The idea of limiting how and where people express certain opinions is hard for Shawntell Pace, the broadcast journalism teacher at Wando High School.

"With the idea of safe spaces, people sometimes think of respectability politics or even political correctness," she said. "But if you have to think 'oh I have to say this instead of this because I don't want to offend people' is your speech really free?"

Sophie Winnick, co-editor in chief of *The Legend*, agrees. Safe spaces can have negative connotations.

"I don't think [speech] should be limited because other people are uncomfortable. I think the best thing to do is to focus on learning from other people and opposite points of views. So the First Amendment is a really important part of that; the clause freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of speech, all of that is protected," Winnick said. "Life isn't a safe space. It's not so cut and dry, and you can't just run away when you feel uncomfortable."

For Pace, tip-toeing around opinions is hard to justify, especially when teaching kids how to form their own opinions and talk about issues very publicly in the media.

"I believe, as a teacher, that my students should think critically. You want them to analyze," she said. "You're supposed to hold your government, your school, and your peers accountable for their actions. If you don't do that, than what's the point of being a journalist?"

Some forms of safe spaces may get in the way of true expression, but Pace doesn't approve of letting discrimination and harassment continue.

"A safe space could also just be you telling that narrative so that other people watching that broadcast or reading that paper knows that there is somebody that feels the way that they feel or thinks the way that they think or that there is a community involved. That's why I think that it's so important to tell stories. That's why we do what we do."

Where is your safe space?



Tai Van Dyke

Senior, Northwest High School

"I'm part of the school's GSA [Gay Straight Alliance] and that's a safe space for me. It's a place where people can voice their opinions and not worry about harassment or rude commentary. I think that's definitely good for a lot of people... I just feel like I can talk about my experiences openly and it's an environment that I can feel comfortable in. And I'm transgender, so especially at my school I don't always feel like I can discuss things openly and in that area I feel like I can."

Ariah Massey

Junior, Nation Ford High School

"Safe space to me is a place where I can relieve myself of certain emotions when I get too overwhelmed. Our guidance department has a room where you can go and decompress and stuff and that is the same thing as my room. I go there to release any tensions that I felt that I had throughout the day."



Bradley Wright

Junior, Sparkman High School

"I would definitely say journalism class [is a safe space] for me because it's one of those classes where it's more than just a class: it's a family. We spend time with each other and go on trips and spend quality time with one another."

Bria Echos

Sophomore, Clarke Central High School

"I think my safe places the library. It's quiet and I really get to focus. I feel like I can talk to a lot of people there, and you get to read about interesting things and you really get to be creative. I get a lot of inspiration when I read and when I go to the library... seeing things like pictures hanging around and getting to be a part of the things that are going on in there. Like they have chess club and we stay all night after the library is closed, doing really cool things. It's really fun."

