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### Why Jonathan Zimmerman's Argument Succeeds to Persuade

A safe space is “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.” (Oxford Dictionary). Jonathan Zimmerman’s article “College Campuses Should Not Be Safe Spaces” argues how safe spaces can be limiting to discussions and to learning. The safe space doctrine declares any discomfoting words for others out of bounds. Zimmerman presents his side of how learning without safe spaces is more beneficial through personal experiences, quotes from professionals and students, and describing events that caused protest or even violence.

For example, the Silent Sam confederate memorial was fully removed after the statue was taken down by protesters. The complete removal of the statue was an act to protect the safety of people on campus. Students on campus felt not “the potential violence triggered by Silent Sam; instead, it’s that the monument itself is a form of violence against them.” Zimmerman explains “Of course those symbols should make us feel bad. But that’s the worst possible reason to rid ourselves of them.” A main point presented in his argument is that opposing ideas and practices are essential for learning. The use of rhetorical strategies (ethos, pathos, and logos) appeals to the reader to back up his argument that colleges should not have safe spaces.

The pathos appeal is used when Zimmerman describes his own experiences to back up his argument. Through his personal experience as part of the Bard Prison Initiative, which

provides undergraduate degree programs for incarcerated students, he saw how an uncensored discussion turned out. In making his argument, Zimmerman tells us “It was one of the fullest, freest discussions I had ever led. At the end, I realized why: The students weren’t afraid to give offense.” The reader can connect his personal story to any discussions they had themselves without censorship. The reader can empathize with Zimmerman and realize that first hand experiences are a strong way to back up an argument. The reader can also feel like the argument is more trustworthy and credible, appealing to the ethos side of rhetorical strategies.

Zimmerman teaches education and history at the University of Pennsylvania which gives him more credibility. A reader feels the author is trustworthy from his background and expertise in the areas of learning environments and discussions between students. More credibility is added when Zimmerman conveys the thoughts of another professor. A book by Daniel Karpowitz is quoted to further the idea that discussions held in prison without censorship are deeper and richer. “Students on the college’s main campus, in New York, often pull their punches when a given topic of discussion makes them feel ‘uncomfortable.’ But her students in prison don’t hold back.” The reader figures other teachers with the same experience also have similar opinions on how safe spaces are limiting factors to learning.

A point that can be made against this type of example is that not everyone grows up as exposed to violence as these incarcerated students are. They know that actions are more meaningful than words can be. People take offense at different levels which can make it hard to have a full discussion that will go over topics that are discomfoting to others. Through safe spaces, people believe that the words themselves are the danger to others that think differently. Zimmerman’s personal experiences and use of other teachers with similar experiences strengthens his argument.

Including these credible sources with surveys and quotes from students and faculty on campus, Zimmerman uses logos to appeal to the reader as well. In 2016, a group of students argued that American flags flown across campus for a 9/11 memorial endangered their safety. “For us, the flag is a symbol of institutionalized violence.” Zimmerman brings up how they have every right to protest it, but should not be insulted by it just because it hurts their feelings. The reader feels logically, if people feel endangered by flags and emblems the whole campus would have to be barren just for everyone to feel safe.

The use of these rhetorical strategies lead to a successful argument that safe spaces can be counterproductive to learning and discussions. Through the use of Zimmerman’s examples, experiences, and other professionals on the topic, the reader can feel exactly where the author is coming from. The credibility is there, feelings of how a personal experience can back an argument, and logical appeals from the author can persuade a reader to share the same viewpoint Zimmerman has.

## Works cited

Zimmerman, Jonathan. "College Campuses Should Not Be Safe Spaces." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, The Chronicle of Higher Education, 22 July 2020,  
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/college-campuses-should-not-be-safe-spaces/>.