



## Uncomfortable Learning

One really cold December morning I was driving to my office, listening to a C-Span Washington Journal archive from June 2017. I heard Zachery Wood, president of the Uncomfortable Learning Club at Williams College, testifying in a Senate hearing on Free Speech on College Campuses.

The Uncomfortable Learning Club's primary purpose is to hold conversations with individuals who have very different views, learning to listen and to engage intellectually: "to confront controversy, clarify issues that challenge people the most... [and to understand] content of competing arguments and how best to respond to unwelcome ideas and offensive speech".

The members' task, it would seem, is to sharpen the intellect, to remain open minded, to be able to take in differing views with an ear to addressing the type of problems that needs a collaborative process to reach resolution.

Zachary Wood had invited a speaker well known for making public comments "offensive" in the extreme; the entire college was invited to this event. Through Facebook the student body, however, objected vociferously to this speaker's being invited and raised the din to such a level that, ultimately, the college president stepped in and 'disinvited' the speaker. He did so, he said, to protect the students and keep the "space safe".

Listening to this testimony, I was reminded of us, analysts & psychotherapists, in sessions, listening to the deeper, privately held beliefs, thoughts, and fantasies of our patients and how hesitant they are to let us know out of fear they will offend us and be judged by us, maybe even being "disinvited" from treatment.

Always, it is our task to carry on with intellectual rigor, even while the patient's emotions fill the room. The question, then, arises: how are analysts and psychotherapists able to remain neutral in the service of those who ask us for help in coming to know themselves?

Does a part of our mind come to our rescue and protect us from the "offensive" just as the president of Williams College "protected" his students? Are we moved to judgment...do we speak up and cancel the patient's speaking engagement... disinvite the unfiltered, spontaneous material from the unconscious? No.

Like the Uncomfortable Learning Club's task, it is our job to remain open minded, take in opinions and views that may be different from our own and work collaboratively with our patients in the service of their growth and development. Our consulting rooms are a "safe space" for uncomfortable learning where any idea, thought, fantasy, dream and behavior may be talked about.

**Robin R. Mustain, MSW**

Member, Washington Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis

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## Psychoanalytic Takes on the Cinema

April is a fine time to take in film viewing from a psychoanalytic perspective. Continuing the 2017-2018 season is Psychoanalytic Takes on the Cinema in Bethesda as well as the Leon Levin Psychoanalytic Film Series in Baltimore. For further information ([click here](#)).