

# Physical, mental, and emotional freedom in 'room'



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When thinking of the word “ freedom”, one definition usually comes to mind; physical freedom, or the ability to go wherever, whenever. However, there are many more aspects to freedom than just physical freedom. There is mental freedom, which is having peace of mind and being able to think clearly and there is emotional freedom, which is having the freedom to express your inner thoughts and emotions without fear. The novel *Room*, by Emma Donoghue, is about a five-year-old boy named Jack who has spent his whole life confined in an eleven-by-eleven foot space (“ Room”) with his mother, whom he calls “ Ma”. The novel explores the concept of freedom and discusses how Ma and Jack’s experiences in Room limit their freedom in a physical, mental, and emotional way.

Ma and Jack’s freedom is physically limited in Room, as they are trapped inside by their captor, Old Nick, and are literally unable to escape. They are constricted to the eleven-by-eleven foot perimeters of Room, and when Jack figures out how small a space Room is, it proves further how physically limited he is. As he’s counting the tiles in Room, Jack explains, “ Another rule is, the wide of the walls is the same as the wide of Floor, I count eleven feet going both ways, that means Floor is a square (19).” Later, when Ma tells him about her life before Room and her ability to do whatever she wanted, Jack is curious about what life would be like without four walls surrounding him at all times. Jack asks Ma, “ Could we swing in the hammock?” Ma responds with, “ We could do what we like, we’d be free (90).” Ma knows that she and Jack cannot leave Room as Old Nick will not allow them to but she is hopeful for the day that she and Jack will be physically free. Jack does

not understand what it is like to be able to do whatever he wants and go wherever he would like as his physical freedom is restricted inside of Room.

As well as being physically limited by their experiences in Room, Ma and Jack's mental freedom is also limited. Jack does not perceive the world in the same way as other five-year-olds and Ma is constantly trapped by her memories of Room and Old Nick's abuse. In Room, Jack only interacts with Ma. He is not used to being with kids his own age and when his Grandma later brings him to the park to socialize with other kids, Jack feels uncomfortable and unsafe. (261) "' I can't go in the playground because there's kids not friends of mine,' [I say.] Grandma rolls her eyes. ' You just play at the same time, that's what kids do.'" Since Jack has grown up in an enclosed, isolated, environment, he has not cognitively developed the same way as other kids. He is constrained by his past experiences in Room which have affected him in such a way that he is unaccustomed to being with other kids and has been held back from a normal childhood. Not only has Jack been mentally affected by his experiences in Room, so has Ma. Room is such a part of her identity that even after she leaves Room it is almost impossible for her to go a day without being reminded of it. When she is getting interviewed, after leaving Room, Ma is still sensitive about her experiences inside. When a television interviewer inquires about her relationship with Old Nick, she snaps. (240) " I was just wondering whether, in your view, the genetic, the biological, relationship-' ' There was no relationship," says Ma, she's talking through her teeth." Even though Ma is physically free, she is not mentally free now that she is out of Room. Ma is still haunted by her

memories of Room and everything that Old Nick did to her, and in a way, she is no more free than she was before.

Ultimately what pushes Ma over the edge is not her physical or mental freedom but her lack of emotional freedom. Inside of Room, she could not properly express her emotions without fear of hurting Jack. When she leaves Room, Ma is so overwhelmed by everything that she has kept contained that she deems the only solution to be suicide. When Jack finds Ma after she overdoses, he realizes just how limited her emotional freedom was, and begins to understand why she did what she did. “ She took the bad medicine, I think she was too tired to play anymore, she was in a hurry to get to Heaven so she didn’t wait . (257)” Ma feels she should be happy after escaping Room, the prison she has been locked up in for the past seven years of her life, but she feels everything but happiness. When she is having a conversation with Grandma, Grandma thinks that she needs rest. Ma knows that sleep can not fix her feelings of instability. Jack observes his mother: “ Ma says, ‘ I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I’m supposed to be happy.’ ‘ You just need to rest, okay?,’ says Grandma. ‘ No, I don’t. I don’t need to rest! (270)’” Ma’s experiences in Room have limited her emotional freedom. In Room Ma was unable to complain otherwise Old Nick would hurt her. Ma does not feel happy despite escaping Room as she is emotionally overwhelmed and her experiences have completely limited her overall emotional freedom.

It can be concluded that Ma and Jack’s experiences in Room have limited their freedom in multiple ways: Physically, they were unable to leave Room; mentally, they are haunted by their memories of Room; and emotionally

their experiences have left Ma and Jack overwhelmed, and have prevented the two of them from living normal lives. As Ma puts it, “ People are locked up in all sorts of ways (242).”