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From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces

A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice

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THE PRACTICE OF establishing ground rules or guidelines for conversations and behavior is foundational to diversity and social justice learning activities. As student affairs educators, we expect this process will help create a learning environment that allows students to engage with one another over controversial issues with honesty, sensitivity, and respect. We often describe such environments as *safe spaces*, terminology we hope will be reassuring to participants who feel anxious about sharing their thoughts and feelings regarding these sensitive and controversial issues.

But to what extent can we promise the kind of safety our students might expect from us? We have found with increasing regularity that participants invoke in protest the common ground rules associated with the idea of safe space when the dialogue moves from polite to provocative. When we queried students about their rationales, their responses varied, yet shared a common theme: a conflation of safety with comfort. We began to wonder what accounts for this conflation. It may arise in part from the defensive tendency to discount, deflect, or retreat from a challenge. Upon further reflection, another possibility arose. Were we adequately and honestly preparing students to be challenged in this way? Were we in fact hindering our own efforts by relying on the traditional language of safe space?

As we explored these thorny questions, it became increasingly clear to us that our approach to initiating social justice dialogues should not be to convince participants that we can remove risk from the equation, for this is simply impossible. Rather, we propose revising our language, shifting away from the concept of safety and emphasizing the importance of bravery instead, to help students better understand—and rise to—the challenges of genuine dialogue on diversity and social justice issues.

CASE STUDY

We first began to question and rethink the framework of safe space as colleagues working in the Department of Residential Education at New York University. The critical moment that spurred this rethinking occurred when planning and implementing aspects of our fall resident assistant training program. The department approached the task of training our resident assistants on a wide range of content areas before the start of the academic year by developing a series of 90-minute training modules. As members of our department's diversity committee, we were tasked with developing a training module on diversity and social justice. We were excited for an opportunity to channel our passion for social justice education into an important aspect of student leadership training, yet also challenged by the short session time frame of 90 minutes. Our intended learning outcomes for this module were ambitious even without the challenge of time constraints. How, we wondered, would we introduce the concepts of social and cultural identity, power, and privilege; encourage reflection on how these forces moved through and shaped their lives; and draw connections between the session content and their roles as student leaders?

Given our goals for the session, we decided to incorporate the One Step Forward, One Step Backward activity, which is also called Leveling the Playing Field and Crossing the Line. In this exercise, participants are lined up in the middle of the room. The facilitator then reads a series of statements related to social identity, privilege, and oppression; participants determine whether these statements are reflective of their lived experiences and then either step forward, step backward, or remain in place as directed. After all prompts have been read, the facilitator leads a group discussion about their interpretations of the pattern of the distribution of participants in the room. Students who hold primarily dominant group identities usually end up in the front of the room, those who hold primarily target group identities in the rear, and those with a more even split of dominant and target group identities in between the other two groups. The goal of the exercise is to visually illustrate the phenomenon of social stratification and injustice and how participants' own lives are thereby affected. The exercise intentionally pushes the boundaries of the participants' comfort zones in the hope of spurring them on to powerful learning about social justice issues.

After our module on diversity and social justice, we received mixed feedback about the One Step Forward, One Step Backward activity from the student participants and from our colleagues who had served as facilitators for other groups. Some participants reported they experienced heightened awareness of social justice issues as a positive result. Most, however, were critical of the activity. This critical feedback appeared largely dependent on the social identities of the participant and the degree to which their target or agent group identities held salience for them.

Participants who framed the activity primarily through their agent or dominant group identities stated they felt persecuted, blamed, and negatively judged for ending the exercise at the front of the room. Many expressed feelings of guilt about their position in the exercise (though not necessarily their privilege), as well as helplessness when hearing the emotional reactions of those who were closer to the rear of the room. Common reactions included sayings such as, "I can't help being White" and "These problems aren't my fault."

Conversely, those who framed the activity primarily through their target group identities ended up in the back of the room. Many of these participants stated their physical position at the conclusion of the exercise was a painful reminder of the oppression and marginalization they experience on a daily basis. Whereas their agent group peers expressed surprise at the pattern of distribution, many of the target group participants stated they predicted the result of the activity from the beginning. Like their agent group peers, the target group participants voiced frustration with the activity, though their feelings tended to stem from a sense of being placed in the familiar role of educator for agent group members—a role they felt was inevitably theirs but one that made them feel angry, sorrowful, and in some cases, afraid of the repercussions.

Interestingly, a critique shared by many participants across target and agent group identities was that they experienced the activity as a violation of the safe space ground rules established with each participant group at the outset of the module. The profound feelings of discomfort many of them experienced were, in their view, incongruent with the idea of safety.

It was apparent to us that on the whole our session had missed the mark with respect to our intended outcomes, sparking the first of many long discussions between us. Although it was tempting to simply lump the critiques together as the typical resistance you can expect when talking to folks about power and privilege, we knew this was an oversimplification that would not result in improved pedagogical practice or richer learning for our students. What was the critical flaw in our design? Did we select the wrong activities or place them in the wrong sequence? Did we do a poor job of training our colleagues to facilitate the session? While mining these questions resulted in some useful insights—for example, we no longer use the One Step Forward activity as part of our facilitation practice, primarily because we are troubled by its potential to revictimize target group members—we continually returned to the quandary of safe space. Was it the activity that had made our students feel unsafe, or did this sense of danger originate somewhere else? It was here that we began to more closely examine the conventional wisdom of safety as a prerequisite for effective social justice education and question to what degree the goal of safety was realistic, compatible, or even appropriate for such learning. What is meant by the concept of safety, and how does that change based on the identities in the room?

DEFINING AND DECONSTRUCTING SAFE SPACE

Many scholars have described visions of safe space as it relates to diversity and social justice learning environments. Among them are Holley and Steiner (2005), who described safe space as an "environment in which students are willing and able to participate and honestly struggle with challenging issues" (p. 49). Staff at the Arizona State University Intergroup Relations Center described the contours of safe space in more detail, with a stated objective of creating "an environment in which everyone feels comfortable expressing themselves and participating fully, without fear of attack, ridicule, or denial of experience" (as cited by National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation, n.d., §S). To create such spaces, "participants need some basic discussion guidelines in order to develop trust and safety" (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2007, p. 54).

Consistent with the literature, we believe facilitators of social justice education have a responsibility to foster a learning environment that supports participants in the challenging work of authentic engagement with regard to issues of identity, oppression, power, and privilege. Student development theorists assert that to support this kind of learning, educators must take care to balance contradiction to a student's current way of thinking with positive encouragement to explore new ways of thinking (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Kegan, 1982; King & Kitchener, 1994; Sanford, 1966). Further, we share the conviction that violence of any kind—physical, emotional, and psychological—is antithetical to the aims of social justice work; indeed, we see the use of violence to achieve one's goals as a patriarchal norm that should be challenged through such work. As such, we see great value in many of the tenets of safe space as well as the common practice of setting expectations, often called *ground rules*, with the learning group regarding how we will engage with one another on these subjects.

We question, however, the degree to which safety is an appropriate or reasonable expectation for any honest dialogue about social justice. The word *safe* is defined in the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary as "free from harm or risk . . . affording safety or security from danger, risk, or difficulty . . . unlikely to produce controversy or contradiction" (Safe, 2010). We argue that authentic learning about social justice often requires the very qualities of risk, difficulty, and controversy that are defined as incompatible with safety. These kinds of challenges are particularly unavoidable in participant groups composed of target and agent group members. In such settings, target and agent group members take risks by participating fully and truthfully, though these risks differ substantially by group membership and which identities hold the most salience for a given participant at a given time.

For agent group members, facing evidence of the existence of their unearned privilege, reflecting on how and to what degree they have colluded with or participated in oppressive acts, hearing the stories of pain and struggle from target group members, and fielding direct challenges to their worldview from their peers can elicit a range of negative emotions, such as fear, sorrow, and anger. Such emotions can feed a sense of guilt and hopelessness. Choosing to engage in such activity in the first place, much less stay engaged, is not a low-risk decision and, therefore, is inconsistent with the definition of *safety* as being free of discomfort or difficulty.

Indeed, the unanticipated discomfort and difficulty many agent group members experience as a result of participation in a social justice learning activity can also lead to resistance and denial. Here, the truth of how power and privilege have moved in one's life is rejected, and energy is redirected toward critiquing the activity (rather than the content) as the source of her or his discomfort or explaining away others' experiences as springing not from oppression but from some other more benign source, disconnected from oneself. In this manner, the language of safety may actually encourage entrenchment in privilege, which we may be able to curtail more effectively by building conditions in which agent group members understand and expect from the outset that challenge is forthcoming.

Further, it is our view that the agent group impulse to classify challenges to one's power and privilege as actions that detract from a sense of safety is, in itself, a manifestation of dominance. For example, Wise (2004), in his essay critiquing Whites' insistence on safety as a condition of their participation in a cross-racial dialogue about racism, describes this expectation as "the ultimate expression of White privilege" (¶ 15), whereby Whites attempt to define for others—and especially people of color—how they wish to be confronted about issues of race and racism. People of color are then expected to constrain their participation and interactions to conform to White expectations of safety—itself an act of racism and White resistance and denial. In this manner, we suggest that the language of safety contributes to the replication of dominance and subordination, rather than a dismantling thereof. This assertion does not mean we believe anything goes is a better approach; rather, we suggest we do participants a disservice by reinforcing expectations shaped largely by the very forces of privilege and oppression that we seek to challenge through social justice education.

Members of the target group are even more disserved by well-intentioned efforts to create safety. Target group members may, in fact, react with incredulity to the very notion of safety, for history and experience has demonstrated clearly to them that to name their oppression, and the perpetrators thereof, is a profoundly unsafe activity, particularly if they are impassioned (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). They are aware that an authentic expression of the pain they experience as a result of oppression is likely to result in their dismissal and condemnation as hypersensitive or unduly aggressive (Sparks, 2002). This dilemma looms large for target group members in any social-justice-related learning activity; reflecting on and sharing their direct experiences with oppression, and listening to dominant group members do the same, will likely result in heightened pain, discomfort, and resentment. These feelings alone are inconsistent with the definition of *safety* and exacerbated by ground rules that discourage them from being genuinely voiced lest they clash with agent group members' expectations for the dialogue.

Indeed, the pervasive nature of systemic and institutionalized oppression precludes the creation of safety in a dialogue situated, as it must be, within said system. As Wise (2004) observed with respect to race, "This country is never safe for people of color. Its schools are not safe; its streets are not safe; its places of employment are not safe; its health care system is not safe" (¶ 35).

Though Wise focuses on racism, we argue that his formulation about safety can also be applied to examinations of sexism, homophobia, heterosexism, ableism, religio-spiritual oppression, ageism, U.S.-centrism, and other manifestations of oppression. Viewed through this lens, we see that assurances of safety for target group members are just as misguided as they are for agent group members.

We have come to believe, as argued by Boostrom (1998), that we cannot foster critical dialogue regarding social justice

> by turning the classroom into a "safe space", a place in which teachers rule out conflict. . . . We have to be *brave* [emphasis added] because along the way we are going to be "vulnerable and exposed"; we are going to encounter images that are "alienating and shocking". We are going to be very unsafe. (p. 407)

BRAVE SPACE: AN ALTERNATIVE FORMULATION AND FACILITATION PRACTICE

As we developed alternatives to the safe space paradigm, we were influenced by Boostrom's (1998) critique of the idea of safe space, and in particular his assertion that bravery is needed because "learning necessarily involves not merely risk, but the pain of giving up a former condition in favour of a new way of seeing things" (p. 399). Some scholars have suggested that pedagogies of fear (Leonardo & Porter, 2010) or discomfort (Boler, 1999; Redmond, 2010) are in closer practical and philosophical alignment with this kind of learning. Although these provocative theories were useful to us, our primary inspiration was from the concept of "courageous conversations about race" (Singleton & Hays, 2008; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Sparks, 2002), a strategy developed specifically to encourage taking risks in dialogues focused on the topic of race and racism. These ideas affirmed our decision to make a small but important linguistic shift in our facilitation practice, whereby we seek to cultivate brave spaces rather than safe spaces for group learning about a broad range of diversity and social justice issues. By revising our framework to emphasize the need for courage rather than the illusion of safety, we better position ourselves to accomplish our learning goals and more accurately reflect the nature of genuine dialogue regarding these challenging and controversial topics.

We have found that the simple act of using the term *brave space* at the outset of a program, workshop, or class has a positive impact in and of itself, transforming a conversation that can otherwise be treated merely as setting tone and parameters or an obligation to meet before beginning the group learning process into an integral and important component of the workshop. *Brave space* is usually a novel term for our students or participants, especially those who are familiar with the idea of safe space, and frequently piques their curiosity. In response, we often ask participants why they think we use the term *brave space* instead of *safe space*, with the goal of involving their critical lenses immediately. It is common for participants to respond by unpacking the idea of safety much like we did as we developed the brave space framework. Creating this space for the participants to make their own meaning of brave space, in addition to sharing our own beliefs as facilitators, can lead to rich learning in alignment with our justice-related objectives.

This process of actualizing brave space in a social justice learning activity continues, appropriately, with the establishment of ground rules. There are many different techniques for establishing ground rules. Often, the mode selected is dependent upon the total amount of time allotted for the learning activity. If time is relatively short, the facilitators may choose to advance a predetermined list of ground rules to preserve limited discussion time for other aspects of the activity. Alternatively, when time permits, facilitators may lead a conversation in which the participants generate their own list of ground rules. A hybrid version of both approaches is another possibility, whereby the facilitators suggest some ground rules and invite participants to ask questions about these as well as share additional ground rules of their own. In any case, facilitators will likely seek commitment from the group to adhere to these ground rules throughout the activity, although they may also indicate the rules can be revisited and revised as needed as the activity progresses.

We strongly encourage facilitators who use the brave space framework to strive for protracted dialogue in defining *brave space* and setting ground rules, treating this conversation not as a prelude to learning about social justice but as a valuable part of such learning. We have found that so doing allows us as facilitators to demonstrate openness to learning from participants, thereby disrupting and decentering dominant narratives in which knowledge flows one way from teachers to students. A collectivist approach, wherein all participants have the opportunity to shape the group norms and expectations, is more consistent with the overall goal of social justice education than one in which the facilitators dictate the terms of learning (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994).

Whatever methodology is used to create ground rules, commonly used ground rules include "agree to disagree," "don't take things personally," "challenge by choice," "respect," and "no attacks." We believe that unexamined, these common ground rules may contribute to the conflation of safety and comfort and restrict participant engagement and learning. In the section that follows, we discuss these common ground rules and characteristics of safe spaces. We also offer some alternatives and examples for processing the complexity of these guidelines that are more consistent with social justice education goals and the establishment of brave spaces. In setting up guidelines for social justice conversations, we aim to encourage participants to be brave in exploring content that pushes them to the edges of their comfort zones to maximize learning. We offer all of these to support facilitators in thinking critically about how ground rules can help or hinder students in full and truthful engagement.

Common Rule 1: Agree to disagree. Implicit in this common ground rule is that disagreements often occur in dialogues about diversity and social justice. We welcome the voicing of disagreement and encourage students to offer contrasting views. However, we believe that agreeing to disagree can be used to retreat from conflict in an attempt to avoid discomfort and the potential for damaged relationships. We often hear students say, "I'm not going to change my mind, and neither are they; what is the point of continuing to talk?" In our view, some of the richest learning springs from ongoing explorations of conflict, whereby participants seek to understand an opposing viewpoint. Such exploration may or may not lead to a change or convergence of opinions or one side winning the debate, but neither of these is among our objectives for our students; we find these outcomes to be reflective of a patriarchal approach to conflict, in which domination and winning over others to one's own point of view is the goal.

Further, we believe that agreeing to disagree in a conversation about social justice not only stymies learning for all participants, it can also serve to reinforce systems of oppression by providing an opportunity for agent group members to exercise their privilege to opt out of a conversation that makes them uncomfortable. Consider, for example, a workshop focused on the topic of sexism. The participants are engaging in a lively and contentious discussion about how sexism has an impact on leadership and employment opportunities for women in the United States. Many of the women, and some of the men, in the room have shared statistics indicating that women are underrepresented in positions of leadership and still paid less than men for the same work. Most of the men in the room contest this view and offer high-profile examples of women who have "made it." Weary of the back-and-forth conflict, the men invoke the rule of agreeing to disagree. The conversation is halted, and the result is that the system of sexism that continues to confer unearned privileges to men and restrict freedom and opportunities for women is left unexamined. This outcome is harmful for all involved, but women carry the largest part of that burden.

An alternative rule is needed, one that inspires courage in the face of conflict and continues rather than stops the dialogue process. Without such a guideline, we are compromised in our ability to facilitate learning that advances social justice for all people. To this end, we suggest that facilitators explore the concept of controversy with civility and how it may prove a stronger fit with the goal of dialogue. *Controversy with civility*, a term drawn from the social change model of leadership development (Astin & Astin, 1996), is "a value whereby different views are expected and honored with a group commitment to understand the sources of disagreement and to work cooperatively toward common solutions" (p. 59). We find this proposed rule to be in much closer alignment with our philosophy of social justice education than agreeing to disagree. It frames conflict not as something to be avoided but as a natural outcome in a diverse group. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of continued engagement through conflict and indicates that such activity strengthens rather than weakens diverse communities.

As we discuss later, it is important to note that the word *civility*, in our view, allows room for strong emotion and rigorous challenge. It does not require target group members to restrain their participation to prevent agent group members from disengaging. It does, however, require target and agent group members to be attentive to the ways patriarchal societies socialize their members to view aggression and dominance as normative means to approach conflict and to use care to avoid replicating oppressive behaviors while engaged in the pursuit of justice for all people.

Common Rule 2: Don't take things personally. We see this often-used rule as closely related to two other common rules: no judgments and it's okay to make mistakes. Invoking these rules seems to be intended to encourage participants to become involved dispassionately to maintain safety in the learning environment—in other words, safe spaces. Moreover, it also primes participants for the inevitability of missteps while they are exploring social justice issues. These rules may be very reassuring to participants who are concerned that at some point in the activity they will betray ignorance attributable to one of their agent group memberships and do not wish to be labeled or dismissed by their peers as sexist, racist, ableist, and so forth. So reassured, they may participate and engage with less fear and greater honesty.

We share the desire for authenticity and see value in the acknowledgment that human beings are imperfect and should not be expected to behave otherwise. However, we have a number of problems with the use of these rules to ground a social justice dialogue. First, they fail to account for another truth we hold about human beings: although we have some choice in how we respond to and express our emotions, we do not have control over which ones we experience at any given time and to what degree. We suggest that the view we can and should demonstrate such control is reflective of patriarchy, whereby emotional restraint—a normatively masculine behavior—is unjustly overvalued.

Further, we argue that these rules shift responsibility for any emotional impact of what a participant says or shares to the emotionally affected people. Those affected are now expected to hide their feelings and process them internally; the rules may even imply to these participants that their feelings are because of some failing on their part. According to the rules, the affected parties are only permitted to react outwardly in a manner that does not imply negative judgment of the participant who has caused the impact, lest this person be shamed into silence. The affected people are in this way doubly affected—first by the event that triggered their emotions and then again by the responsibility for managing them. These rules also prevent the person who caused the impact from carrying a share of the emotional load and preclude the possibility of meaningful reflection on her or his actions.

In our analysis, these rules do not protect any participants' safety and certainly not that of the target group members, who are more often than not the affected and silenced participants. Rather, they preserve comfort for agent group members, who may allow their power and dominance to show without having it reflected to them and without being held accountable for it. We are careful here to avoid saying that agent group members are served by such a rule; we believe it protects their privilege, but in so doing it also does them a disservice. None of these outcomes is consistent with our view of social justice, so we choose different language—*own your intentions and your impact*—to ground our pedagogy. This language acknowledges that intention and impact matter. It also makes clear that the impact of our actions is not always congruent with our intentions and that positive or neutral intentions do not trump negative impact.

For example, in a conversation about gender expression, gender normative or cisgender people (those whose gender expression aligns with dominant social expectations of their biological sex) may inadvertently cause pain to transgender participants by expressing incredulity about how a biologically male person could be a woman. If the trans participants have been supported in choosing to approach controversy with civility by letting it be known they have been harmed and why, there are now opportunities where silence would have left only closed doors and untouched systems of oppression. The trans participants have not been forced, as is so often the case, into silence but rather have exercised agency by participating truthfully. The gender normative participants are aware they have caused harm and can seek to better understand how and why they did so and what role their privilege as gender normative people has played in creating the gap between intention and impact. All participants, if they so choose, can better explore with one another ways to challenge the social scripts that frame gender as binary and essentially as indistinguishable from biological sex. These results would have been discouraged in an environment in which the trans students were directed to not take things personally.

Common Rule 3: Challenge by choice. This guideline emerged in the field of adventure education and outdoor learning and has since been widely applied in social justice education. Challenge by choice means individuals will determine for themselves if and to what degree they will participate in a given activity, and this choice will be honored by facilitators and other participants (Neill, 2008). The principle of challenge by choice highlights what we view as an important truth in social justice education. Though a given activity or discussion question may provide a challenging opportunity for participant learning, much of that learning may be internal. Students may not externalize evidence of the degree to which they are engaged, but this does not mean they are not wrestling with difficult questions or critically examining how privilege moves in their lives and the lives of others. Further, we recognize this kind of engagement cannot be forced. As facilitators, we might make a pointed observation or pose a provocative question in hopes of spurring such engagement. For example, during a conversation about the controversy over same-sex marriage, we might say, "We notice that only folks who have identified as lesbian or gay have said anything in this conversation; we'd like to invite anyone who identifies normatively with respect to sexual orientation to share their thoughts." However, we understand it is ultimately in the participants' hands to decide whether they respond and to what extent they will push the boundaries of their comfort zones.

Given this reality we believe it is important to do more than simply affirm it by establishing challenge by choice as a ground rule. We believe it is also necessary to actively encourage participants to be aware of what factors influence their decisions about whether to challenge themselves on a given issue. We see this awareness as being particularly important for agent group members. Returning to our example of the same-sex marriage conversation, silence from heterosexual participants could signify any number of things. Some of them might have been thinking deeply about what it means to their being able to enter a civil marriage with their chosen partner, while others could not. Some might have even been formulating a thought to share with the group. Some might have been very uncomfortable with the topic and decided they were unable to rise to the challenge of discussing it.

In the latter case, it is our hope the internal process does not stop at the decision not to accept the challenge. Therefore, when discussing challenge by choice, we also ask participants to think about what keeps them from challenging themselves. Do they hold what they believe is an unpopular viewpoint? Are they fearful of how others will react to their thoughts? Are they simply tired and not able to formulate a thoughtful contribution that day? Whatever the reason, we hope our participants will be attentive to it.

We encourage participants to be especially attentive to the degree to which their agent group memberships inform their decision about whether and how deeply to engage in a challenging activity or dialogue. Specifically, we suggest they consider how their daily lives are affected if they choose not to challenge themselves, and by contrast, how target group members' daily lives are affected by the same decision. If they come to suspect or clearly see their privilege enables them to make the choice not to challenge themselves, and that oppression often invalidates such a choice for target group members, we hope this knowledge factors into their decisions about how and when they choose to challenge themselves.

Common Rule 4: Respect. Of all the common rules, we have experienced this one as the least controversial and the least discussed. When respect is offered as a ground rule, most of our participants agree readily that it should be adopted—they want to be respected, and they want to be respectful to others—and move quickly on to the next point of discussion.

We believe it is important to spend more time discussing respect with the group. We often ask them what respect looks like: How does someone demonstrate respect for you? Delving into this question can reveal various cultural understandings of the term and mitigate assumptions participants bring with them about what kinds of behaviors are respectful. For example, participants will often say that interrupting someone who is speaking is a form of disrespect. As facilitators, we use this as an opportunity to demonstrate multipartiality (see Chapter 10) by affirming this particular understanding but also by acknowledging that in some cultural contexts interruption and talking over one another is welcome; we then invite participants to share any examples they might have from their own experiences. The objective here is not to lead participants to consensus but rather to support them in maintaining increased mindfulness of the different ways they can demonstrate respectfulness to one another.

We also circle back to the idea of controversy with civility when conversing about respect. Specifically, we ask participants to give an example of how they might firmly challenge the views of someone else in a respectful manner. By further discussing the examples, the group can develop more clarity about ways to firmly and respectfully challenge others and how to respond when they themselves are firmly and respectfully challenged. Such discussion is a potentially fruitful investment of time that can prevent students from automatically experiencing and interpreting challenges from others as acts of disrespect.

Common Rule 5: No attacks. The fifth and final of our common rules for creating brave spaces is closely connected to the previous rule of respect. Many of our students have described attacks as a form of extreme disrespect, a view we agree with and connect directly to our rejection of any form of violence as a viable means for advancing social justice. As with respect, we find this rule is usually agreed to speedily and, in the absence of facilitator intervention, without discussion.

Here again, we advocate for clarifying conversation. We typically ask our participants to describe the differences between a personal attack on an individual and a challenge to an individual's idea or belief or statement that simply makes an individual feel uncomfortable. These examples are always very instructive. Most of the examples participants identify clearly as attacks—"You're a jerk," "Your idea is worthless," and so on—have never actually occurred in any session we have facilitated. However, those that are classified during this conversation as challenges—"What you said made me feel angry," "I find that idea to be heterosexist," and so on—are ones that in our experience are regularly named as attacks later on by the recipients of the challenges. At this point, we have found it helpful to remind participants of the group's responses during this portion of the ground rules discussion;

doing so has helped participants remember that pointed challenges are not necessarily attacks, but the uncomfortable experience that may result can sometimes lead to a defensive reaction. The attention can then be turned away from the distraction of the nonattack and toward the roots of the defensive response—more often than not, a sense of threat to the privileges of one's agent group membership.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We have found that reframing ground rules to establish brave space is an asset to us in our work as social justice facilitators. It has helped us to better prepare participants to interact authentically with one another in challenging dialogues. Moreover, as compared to the idea of safe space, brave space is more congruent with our understanding of power, privilege, and oppression, and the challenges inherent in dialogue about these issues in socioculturally diverse groups. The feedback we have received from attendees at presentations (Arao & Clemens, 2006) and participants in workshops we facilitate—including students, staff, and faculty—has been universally positive, and many have requested our assistance in learning and using the brave space framework in their own practice. Still, we recognize that brave space remains a relatively new framework with ample room for growth and refinement. Our evidence of its efficacy is primarily anecdotal. We believe qualitative and quantitative studies would be useful in measuring how brave space is experienced by participants in social justice educational efforts and how it influences their learning and participation in these settings. Further, we welcome your additional philosophical and theoretical analysis of the framework as articulated here, as we know that others will see and understand the strengths and shortfalls of brave space in ways we, as yet, do not. We look forward to continued engagement with you in our shared journey to develop ever more efficacious social justice facilitation practices.

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