

From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces

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The Source:

Arao, B., & Clemens, K. (2013). From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: a new way to frame dialogue around diversity and social justice. In Landreman, L. (Ed.), *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators* (pp. 135-150). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

The chapter is available online from the U of Michigan School of Social Work:

<https://ssw.umich.edu/sites/default/files/documents/events/colc/from-safe-spaces-to-brave-spaces.pdf>

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The Differences:

- A safe space is a manifestation of dominance and privilege
- Safety is not a reasonable expectation in an honest discussion about social justice issues
- Framing activities are vital to creating a brave space, particularly the ground rules

Ground Rules:

A large part of the chapter is devoted to the linguistics of the ground rules in formulating a brave space, and how challenging familiar/established ground rules in facilitation can move a safe space to a brave space. Particular examples offered include:

- *Agree to Disagree* restated as *Controversy with Civility*
- *Don't Take Things Personally* restated as *Own Your Intentions and Your Impact*
- *Challenge by Choice* restated as *Consider the Impact of Your Participation*
- Consider what *Respect* looks like culturally and with regard to bravery
- Consider what *No Attacks* looks like culturally and with regard to bravery

Remember: Controversy and Conflict Are Okay!

A big part of formulating a brave space is having something controversial or conflict laden to talk about, and to foster the feeling that it's okay to talk about these issues. That's why a brave space can be particularly useful for discussions around diversity and social justice issues, and can provide more outward and progressive focus than a safe space, which usually focuses on internal motivation, experiences and values.

In librarianship, we have a particularly hard time with conflict and controversy, due to various forces:

- Political concerns (funding, board approval, community approval)
- Gender roles
- Service ethos

A facilitator external to librarianship may be an asset in fostering a brave space, and some sort of formal facilitation training is incredibly useful.