

BLACKLINE

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“SAFE SPACE”

I walk into a space for a 8 hour training on mental health. I walk into a space with 12 strangers and a facilitator. The facilitator is a very personable and engaging LatinX sistah as one would expect most facilitators to be. One of her training agreements was the Vegas rule. At first I'm stumped WTF is a Vegas rule? "What happens here stays here." She states the room is a "safe space" so people are encouraged to share. I think about how people like to say that spaces where strange folks come together are safe.

Does that mean for them that in a room of mixed company, and for me in this particular space included to my eye, men, women, queer, Black, White, LatinX, Indian, Asian, Muslim, politics no longer exists? I noticed that when she said this, myself and the Muslim Sistah did a little eyebrow raise when our eyes connected. At this particular site the door was open for entry, so anyone could walk in off the street, and there was no one at the front desk. I've been resistant to locked facilities for a long time, because they are usually locking out Black folks, but now when I'm in predominantly white sections of town I prefer receptionists at the front desk and/or a buzzer.

What does safe mean in spaces where people don't have a relationship with one another? Being there with a colleague does not count. A lot of us don't disclose personal information with our colleagues, cause bottom line you're not my people. Telling people who have been injured, who are living with trauma, that your space is a “safe space” when you know as facilitator can't know, id dangerous and wrong.

There was a well intentioned white woman who as we all know took up too much space. Yes I checked her a few times when she said "Amerikkans were spoiled," "call the police when someone suffering with mental wellness issues appears aggressive." I told her be careful making such a blanket statement in any room. Especially living in a country where folks were and continue to be trafficked, used for free labor, killed, land stolen. Stop calling the police on people suffering with mental wellness issues who you deem aggressive. This will more than likely escalate the situation and if they are Black, Brown and Indigenous KILLED.

Those kinds of interventions are not safe and take a toll on folks of color who are not the facilitator. By the end of the day I was physically and emotionally done. So, no that space was not safe for me. I've learned to sit in spaces that folks refer to as "Safe" and not engage, for my emotionally well being, but for me in those so called "safe" spaces anti-blackness rhetoric is subtle and overt and my body physically reacts. I will never use the terms micro-aggression and macro-aggression because when I'm physically impacted that's Macro AF. I call a thing a thing - White Supremacy doin what it do.

How does one make a space "Safe"? Is it possible in a room with folks without any type of analysis or relationship? This includes all folks, because some of our folks don't have an oppression analysis either. Should we call it "safe?" Does such a thing exist?

I feel safe in spaces where I know my crew, I trust them with my life and know if the police kicked in the door and dragged me out, they would be at my side demanding my release, cursing the cops out for their brutality and bailing a Sistah out and push come to shove burning some shit down. That's a safe space to me, so most spaces I sit in don't even come close to safe.

I like "liberated spaces" where folks can say what they want and not be disrespected. Where folks can in dialogue and come out somewhat unscathed. Facilitators and the folks in the room need to set the community agreements together. "Somewhat" unscathed cause every training I've ever attended/organized from the best (Undoing Racism Workshop) to the worst (Cultural Competency/Diversity), I've been impacted emotionally and physically. What I like about the Undoing Racism training by People's Institute for Survival and Beyond is that they recognize the impact and debrief. I'm noticing more and more that Black Leadership led trainings and summits are including healing/realistic self-care techniques as a component of the training and summit.

Decreasing the impact on marginalized folks in mixed rooms will take corporations, organizations, and agency's having the courage to include Black, Afro Latina, Femme, Trans, Indigenous Women at the table during the creation of your training module, down to how the facilitators disseminate the information. If folks now claim to be "trauma informed," they must begin to look at the impact of white supremacy on marginalized folks in their training spaces and their training facilitators.

Having knowledge doesn't make us immune to the offense. I'm calling on trainers, agencies, organization and corporations to decolonize your training curricula's. So that you're training spaces are one day truly "safe."

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