Critical Conversations: A Tool for Dismantling White Supremacy at PWI’s

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Honey, I shrunk the workshop

Two Hour Version:
- Community Agreements
- Overview of core concepts
- Collectively read “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy McIntosh
- Collectively generate statements of white privilege in archives
- Collectively generate action items for dismantling those privileges
- Reflection
- Next Steps

Mini version:
- Community Agreements
- Selected core concepts
- Brainstorming examples of white privilege in archives and possible remedies
- Rubenstein Library outcomes
- Planning your own workshop
Community Agreements (1 of 2)

- This session should be a welcoming, supportive, and comfortable space for all participants. You needn’t have done any readings in advance in order to participate.
- Please avoid using your laptop or other devices (not needed for accessibility reasons) during this workshop. Commit to listening and sharing without disruption or interruption.
- Before you speak, you may request that what you say is “off the record.” It will not be shared during the larger group share-back, on social media, or in participant’s notes.
Community Agreements (2 of 2)

- We all have different ways of communicating. You needn’t participate verbally (you can write or draw out your thoughts as well), but we agree to make sure there is time and space for everyone who wants to participate in the dialogue. Practice “move up/move back”: if you are noticing that you are speaking frequently, practice listening; if you are normally listening/quiet, challenge yourself to speak up.
- This workshop will feel different for different people. People’s experiences and backgrounds will vary. Some people will be coming to these ideas for the first time, others will have been grappling with them for a long time. Regardless, no one should be forced to speak up or be asked to speak for an entire identity group.
What is White Supremacy?

"...a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings."

White privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

“I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group”

Peggy McIntosh

What are some examples of white privilege and white supremacy in archives and libraries?

Areas to Consider:

- Arrangement and Description
- Access, Reference, and Instruction
- Preservation
- Appraisal
- Library science & archival education
- Perspectives: Library/archives workers, researchers, donors, community members

Example:
As a white person, I can expect to easily find materials documenting my race’s history and culture in the archive.
What does liberation look like?

The empty space in front of Duke Chapel that used to hold the statue of Robert E. Lee (removed in 2017).
What we did at the Rubenstein Library

- Inspired by a workshop led by Michelle Caswell on *Identifying and Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives* at the Society of American Archivists annual meeting in Portland, OR, in 2017
- Wholehearted support from Rubenstein Library Leadership Team was essential; all staff strongly encouraged (aka required) to attend
- Facilitators from the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Council (DivE-In) and other parts of the library were identified and trained
Positive Outcomes

- Developing Facilitator Training
- Inclusive Customer Service Training
- Attention to accessibility across departments
- Development of a Rubenstein Library Values Statement (“How We Work”)
- Position funded to support culturally sensitive description of legacy collections
Challenges

- Race is hard.
- Facilitation is hard.
  - Issues of hierarchy in discussion groups.
- Change is slow and incremental.
- Accessibility became the focus.
Bringing it Back Home (yes, you can do it)
Resources

Michelle Caswell’s “Teaching to Dismantle White Supremacy in Archives” published in The Library Quarterly 2017 87:3, 222-235

Michelle Caswell’s “Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives Workshop Exercise” (PDF available via http://www.archivistsagainst.org)

Peggy McIntosh’s list of white privileges: https://www.racialequitytools.org

Seeds for Change Facilitation guide: https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Duke University Libraries (DivE-In): https://library.duke.edu/about/diversity
Questions for us?

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