Whiteness & Libraries

Lake Superior Library Symposium June 11, 2021 Angie Kelleher, kelleher@alma.edu

Ground rules

- No one knows everything.
 Together we know a lot.
- Intent vs. impact.
- This work requires authenticity and courage.

- This work requires practice. It will be messy and uncomfortable.
- We are all on a journey of learning, and un-learning.
- This work is never done.

Agenda

Introductions, grounding & warm up

Foundation concepts

- Bias
- Advantage/privilege

Common reactions Whiteness & libraries

Questions



A. Public	
B. Academic	
C. K-12 school	
O. Tribal	
E. Special	
F. Other	

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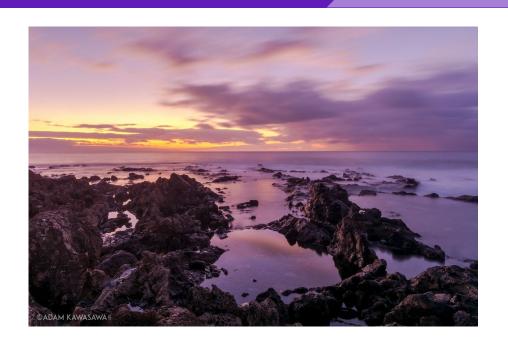
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Body

Breathe. Feet on ground.

Be aware of physical reactions as we go.



More warm-up

1. In chat:

Name a part of your identity for which you are advantaged/privileged?

2. In chat:

Name a part of your identity for which you are disadvantaged/oppressed?

Unconscious bias

- We all have it
- Good/bad binary?
- Guilt/shame
- Examples



Advantage/privilege

- I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the professional company of people of my race most of the time.
- When conducting collection development, I can easily find materials featuring people of my race.
- I can be pretty sure that the person in charge in a library will be a person of my race.
- I can criticize my library or my profession without being seen as an outsider.

★ Does not mean you haven't struggled; it just means that your skin color is not one of the reasons for your struggle.

Whiteness

- How does it feel to hear it named like this?
- It's often invisible, like air we breathe. We tend to think of it as neutral, or normal. It's the default.
- Common reactions to these discussions.
- Examples
- How does this feel in our bodies?

Discussion 1

 How would you feel if a patron said that a library program, or a display, or something that you said, was offensive or racist? Emotions? In your body? Thoughts? (Answer in chat)



Scenario - preferred responses

How do you wish you would handle this situation (in which a patron said that a library program, or a display, or something that you said, was offensive or racist?)

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Culture of whiteness

- Perfectionism, fear of conflict, politeness, little emotion.
- Intention over impact
- Orientation toward action (vs. sitting with feelings, thoughts)
- 'Color-blindness'
- What is it like for colleagues & patrons from marginalized groups?
- Dress, hair, behavior for colleagues, patrons
- Notion of "fit" when hiring.

Now what?

- What is keeping you from having conversations about race and whiteness and libraries?
- What obstacles have you encountered?
- What actions can you take to continue this work personally, and in your professional sphere?

Mentors, teachers, references

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