

Deconstructing Whiteness at MARAC Newark

Friday 21 April 2017, 10:15am-11:45am

Session Description

This workshop session is geared towards archives professionals who want to critically and constructively examine how dynamics of whiteness affect their work. Organizers hope to provide a collaborative and engaging conversation that complements MARAC's ongoing efforts towards cultural competency, diversity, and inclusion. Participants will have an opportunity to critically examine their own experiences around whiteness in archives and engage in meaningful dialogue with colleagues. Following a brief introduction to key concepts and definitions, trained facilitators will lead small groups in a workshop exercise based on Roadside Theater's "Story Circle" methodology. All attendees will be expected to participate in a Story Circle. It will not be possible to accommodate late arrivals or observers. Participants will be asked to respect strict confidentiality within their small groups.

This proposal was inspired in part by dialogue around #ArchivesSoWhite and M. Ramirez's 2015 article "Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative." Reflecting a working definition developed by LIS scholars Bourg, Espinal, Galvan, Hall, Hathcock, and Honma, participants will be asked to engage the concept of "whiteness" as both "the socio-cultural differential of power and privilege that results from categories of race and ethnicity...[and] as a marker for the privilege and power that acts to reinforce itself through hegemonic cultural practice that excludes all who are different." (Hathcock, *White Librarianship in Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS*, 2015)

Ground rules

- Recognize your communication style and be mindful of your nonverbal responses.
- Expect to learn something about yourself and others.
- Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing.
- Participate honestly, openly, and to the fullest of your ability.
- Engage in the process by actively listening as well as speaking.
- Confidentiality, Curiosity & Charity.
- Take responsibility for yourself and what you say.

Other pointers for participants

- The goal is not necessarily to agree with each other, but to gain a deeper understanding.
- If you tend to be quiet in group settings, challenge yourself to share more.
- If you tend to speak up, challenge yourself to listen more.

Tools for dealing with strong emotions

1. **Reiterate** – Restate what you heard.
2. **Contemplate** – Count to ten before responding.
3. **Respire** – Take a breath to check in with yourself.
4. **Communicate** – Speak with compassion and thoughtfulness. Challenge the statement, not the person.

Quick Guide to Story Circles

Introduction (3-5 minutes)

(40 minutes overall)

1. Welcome group and make introductions all around

2. Explain purpose of Story Circles exercise:

- To expand the dialogue on cultural competency in our field.
- To identify common experiences and goals around representation in archives.

3. Introduce basic Story Circle guidelines:

- A Story Circle is a small group of people sitting in a circle telling stories or remembrances, led by a facilitator.
- A story is a *personal* memory, reflection, or narrative.
- The Circle honors the authority and expertise of each story teller. We are each the authority of our own experience.
- Story Circles are as much about listening as about telling.
- Stories are told without interruption.
- Silence is golden and honorable.
- Stories told in the circle will stay in the circle. Honoring this guideline helps assure that the circle is safe and confidential.
- Each Story Circle is different according to its purpose and the needs of the group.

4. Role of the facilitator:

- The facilitator will lead the process and keep time. We will return to the full group by 3:00 PM.
- Stories in this circle may take up to 2 minutes. The facilitator will offer signals at 1 minute and at 30 seconds.
- The facilitator will offer a theme or topic for the first round of storytelling.
- The facilitator may start the storytelling or identify that someone else is clearly ready to go.
- We will proceed around the Circle in one direction, starting with the first person to tell a story.
- People may pass if they are not yet prepared to tell a story. The facilitator will come back around to make sure that those who initially passed have the opportunity to share a story.
- Open conversation or discussion will follow a full round of storytelling.
- The facilitator may ask the circle to identify themes or ideas from the stories told that seem to be in common or have particular resonance in the circle. If such a theme or set of themes calls for it, the facilitator may suggest a second round of stories, based on one of these themes.

5. Story Circle prompt:

- “Share about a time from your childhood when you saw yourself or your community represented in a cultural narrative.”

Work the circle (22-25 minutes, including facilitator’s story)

Debrief as a small group (10-15 minutes)

Optional: If there is time, the group may have a second round of stories.

Adapted from the Dialogue on Race: Jim Crow/White Privilege Issue Group, Montgomery County, VA

The (draft) narrative therapy charter of story-telling rights

David Denborough on behalf of the Dulwich Centre Foundation

Article 1 Everyone has the right to define their experiences and problems in their own words and terms.

Article 2 Everyone has the right for their life to be understood in the context of what they have been through and in the context of their relationships with others.

Article 3 Everyone has the right to invite others who are important to them to be involved in the process of reclaiming their life from the effects of trauma/injustice.

Article 4 Everyone has the right to be free from having problems caused by trauma and injustice located inside them, internally, as if there is some deficit in them and/or their identity. The person is not the problem, the problem is the problem, and the solution is not only personal.

Article 5 Everyone has the right for their responses to trauma to be acknowledged. No one is a passive recipient of trauma/social suffering. People always respond. People always protest injustice.

Article 6 Everyone has the right to have their skills and knowledges of survival respected, honoured and acknowledged.

Article 7 Everyone has the right to know and experience that what they have learnt through hardship can make a contribution to others in similar situations.