

# Whiteness & Libraries

Lake Superior Library Symposium  
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# 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**

# Poll

A. Public

B. Academic

C. K-12 school

D. Tribal

E. Special

F. Other

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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)



# Collaborate Board

## 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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