

Reflecting on Whiteness: Building Our Capacity to Address Race & Racism on Campus and in Communities

Karin Cotterman, M.A. Director of Engage San Francisco,
Leo T. McCarthy Center for Public Service and The Common Good

Michelle Montagno, Psy.D. Associate Professor, Director, PsyD Program
Chair, Department of Integrated Healthcare



Reflecting On Whiteness

The Why and How

THE PILOT PROJECT: REFLECTING ON WHITENESS DIALOGUE SERIES

FORMAT

Three hours, six weeks, ten participants, two facilitators, VP of DECO came to first and last session, sponsored by Office of Diversity Engagement and Community Outreach

Dinner, group discussion, dyad and triad activities, multi-media resources experiential learning, readings, multi-dimensionality exercise, and discussion

Recommended readings, resource page

Main resources we used: UNtraining (www.untraining.org), Katz, J.H. (2003). *White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racism Training*; DiAngelo, R. (2011). *White Fragility*.

THE PILOT PROJECT: REFLECTING ON WHITENESS DIALOGUE SERIES

This is a model for teaching about:

- Racism and white privilege
- White racial identity development & Unlearning white social conditioning
- Use of contemplative practice to build capacity to do this work
- Importance of building community as a means to develop structures of inclusion

TRIPARTITE MODEL: AWARENESS, KNOWLEDGE, AND SKILLS

Sue, D. W., Arredondo, P., & McDavis, R. J. (1992). Multicultural counseling competencies and standards: A call to the profession. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 70*, 477–486.



The Study

Conducted follow-up qualitative interviews 4-6 months post-dialogue series

One-hour semi-structured interviews about participants' experiences since the dialogue series

Highlights from our findings – Themes

- 80% Benefits of contemplative practice
- 70% Institutional Fear
- 80% Critique of Living The Mission
- 70% Challenging Bias or White Privilege
- 70% Institutional Impact of White Privilege
- 90% Costs of Racism to Whites
- 70% Increased Awareness of How Race Impacts Relationships
- 100% Description of Negative Emotional Response
(with no prompting question)

Awareness

“...[I’ve been] reading about white privilege, reading about white anti-racism work, reflecting on my role so I feel like that I have awareness that were just set aflame last fall.”

Knowledge

“...I think about the knowledge about the far reaching tendrils of privilege--of White privilege and supremacy, being more both conscious of that institutionally but also beyond institution...”

Skills

Addressing Inequality

One participant provided examples of talking with white administrators about white identity and stating to their supervisor, **“There are things we can’t understand about this because we are both white. We have to realize that as two white people we cannot make this decision.”**

Contemplative Practice

Internal Action

“[Contemplative practice] is essential and I think it is what’s going to help on a personal level. It is what helps me stay in the work. It’s what helps me feel connected to the possibility of change in myself. It allows me to not sink into self indulgent inactivity.”

A few of our takeaways

- 1) Importance of institutional support
- 2) Institutions change when they are ready to change
 - 1) Recognize that internal work IS change and be cautious of the desire to rush to action
 - 4) Resist the urge to focus on the intellectual realm exclusively
 - 5) There is no way to do this perfectly



Experiential Exercises

Levels of Racism

- **Systemic: institutional, structural**
- **Social: interpersonal, relational**
- **Individual: intrapersonal, internal**



Multidimensionality Practice

Dyadic Discussion

Share stories of your experiences with social and/or individual racism

Levels of Racism

Systemic: institutional, structural

Social: interpersonal, relational

Individual: intrapersonal, internal

Future Directions

How can we shift the paradigm in academia?

What if the goal is building the capacity to sit with uncertainty?

In a setting where vulnerability is often interpreted as weakness, can we turn the tables and view vulnerability as a strength?

How can we acknowledge what we do not know and make room for non-dominant voices to be heard and valued?

Reflections? Questions?

Michelle Montagno, Psy.D.
Associate Professor and Department Chair
Integrated Healthcare
University of San Francisco
mjmontagno@usfca.edu

Karin Cotterman, M.A.
Director, Engage San Francisco
University of San Francisco
kmcotterman@usfca.edu