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360° Final Exhibition Reflection

As we thought about creating our final project, we wanted to find a way to present the broader topics with which we had been grappling with in class to a wider audience in an interactive way. Since Sasha, Sarah, Sarina, Johanna and I all have some experience preparing workshops, we decided that the best way to discuss the topics that we were interested in would be to engage people through a variety of activities aimed at critical thinking. We didn’t expect people to leave the workshop feeling finished; in fact, we wanted them to recognize that the complexity of the issues discussed in the workshop made that impossible. Further conversation and action is critical when addressing topics such as race and privilege. In a way, we hoped that our workshop would leave people feeling the same way we did after our experience at the Cannery, unfinished, but looking forward to letting the information sit for a while, bring to other groups, and imagine possible action steps.

I think that the themes of power, privilege, and race were explored in all three of our classes this semester. From Delpit’s culture of power to the prison-industrial complex to Bryn Mawr’s racial history, we used our readings and in-class discussions to illuminate these themes on a personal and national level. We decided to focus on privilege and race because these were themes that we thought people would be able to connect to even if they didn’t take our class, and that everyone would have a personal place from which to speak and a way to take action, if they saw this as something meaningful to their lives.

I see our workshop relating to our silence class in multiple ways. We used Delpit’s notion of culture of power and codes to frame our thinking and to decide which activities would best help us reach our goal. By explicitly naming the types of privilege that we do and do not hold, we wanted to make clear that there are certain ways in which things that we do not control give us access that others don’t have possess. We used this frame of thinking when we did the privilege walk, in which we attempted to show the different types of privilege that each person in the room holds. Although I think that with more time we could have done a better job at initiating a discussion which explicitly names male, white, or heterosexual privilege we gave a broader picture of it rather than delve into the details. We could have gone into detail specifically in relation to education and our lives at Bryn Mawr, where learning codes seems to be an integral part of some people’s experience. At the time, however, we wanted to talk about privilege in a way that does not lead to guilt, since we didn’t think that this would be productive. Hence why we tried to keep the subject so broad. We also used the ideas of silence as oppression vs. silence as a place for reflection when we planned out these activities. We wanted to showcase how certain voices are silenced due to power dynamics, while others have the privilege of always expecting to be heard. At the same time, we wanted our participants to experience silence as a place for reflection, which is why we did a silent discussion, and Sarah in particular, took long pauses in the privilege activity to allow people to look around and let things sink in. We used these notions of silence because of our experiences with it in the classroom and the ways in which we learned about its different purposes.

We used our Vision class as a way to plan how to present the types of systematic injustices that we learned about at the beginning of the semester with our real life experiences at the Cannery. After learning just how racialized our criminal justice system is, we wanted to bring forth the idea of race as an important marker for identity. We thought about the impact that reading The New Jim Crow had on our experience at the Cannery, in the classroom and at Bryn Mawr. This book gave us a new perspective for recognizing our own racial struggles that we’ve been battling as a campus not only in relation to Perry House but also in the way in which black and Latina women are treated. In talking about race in the workshop, we wanted to make sure that people knew that the battles we fight on campus are much larger. I think that we could have done a better job in including institutionalized racism as part of our workshop. Perhaps specifically when we talked about Bryn Mawr we could have named how institutions play a role in perpetuating racial privilege. I think that Sarah did a good job at comparing our discussions about the Prison Industrial Complex to our conversation in our final circle when people were talking about how Bryn Mawr makes it seem as though students will either get Perry House or financial aid. However, we could have definitely talked about this more in other parts of our workshop. Another way in which we sought to incorporate our learning from our Vision class into the workshop was in talking about walled spaces and niches. When we created a silent discussion around Perry House we wanted people to talk about walls and why these walls are important. I think that the group touched on it a little bit but the conversation quickly moved to how students felt about the administration taking it away. I think that speaks to the current climate at the college concerning that issue.

The most obvious way in which our workshop drew on our readings and discussions from our Voice class was based on the section that we covered in class about the Bryn Mawr walls. Although we began thinking that we wanted to focus on Perry House and to draw from this knowledge in order to plan our workshop, we decided that we wanted to attract a wider audience and tackle a much broader issue. We wanted our workshop to, in some ways, be a place to have a much more complex conversation than one about a building. We thought that focusing on race and privilege would help many people understand why the fight for Perry House is so important for so many of us on campus. By having a trivia that specifically focused on Bryn Mawr’s racial history, we wanted to remind people that these walls have not always been welcoming of women of color and that in many ways they’re still not welcoming (although not as explicitly). We wanted to give people the facts about our history to show how our history impacts the current struggle. Other ways in which we drew from this class to plan our workshop include talking about race in schools/universities and the ways in which voicing our discomforts, questions, and desires are important to move forward. We wanted people to see their voice as something valuable even if they had an unpopular opinion, which is also why we had a silent discussion. Voice as a tool for change was one of our main themes, specifically in our last activity in which Johanna asked people to say what they were ready to do next. In some ways, speaking those words into the space gave a lot of meaning to our workshop.

I learned a lot about delivery in planning for the workshop, especially because we were unsure of who we wanted to come and/or who would come. We wanted to create a broad topic that would help people think about issues of race and privilege from a personal perspective. I learned most about agency and how to ensure that speaking about these huge institutional issues does not take away people’s agency but rather encourages them to move forward. I think that an hour was definitely not enough time to cover everything that we wanted to cover in a comprehensive way, but at least it was introduction to the topics we had discussed this semester. Race and privilege are such complex topics, and so embedded in our everyday lives that I don’t think it can be completely covered in one day. I hope that conversations and workshops like these will keep happening on campus. I attended another event last week in which we briefly talked about the lack of conversation about Latinidad and queerness/sexuality. That conversation left me thinking about all of the (infinite) possibilities that we have to bring about conversations of intersectionality to campus. I think that our workshop did part of it by talking about race and privilege, but I think that it is important to cover other issues. Gender and sexuality or immigration and language, for example, are things that are very much connected to our experience in this 360. I feel, once again, unfinished, and very much looking forward to continuing planning these types of events next semester.