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Addressing and Educating Northwestern Students on White Privilege and Systemic Racism

Bailey Banwart

Hannah Johnson

Calli Shaw

Rachel Wyborny

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Addressing and Educating Northwestern Students on White Privilege and Systemic Racism

Bailey Banwart, Hannah Johnson, Calli Shaw, Rachel Wyborny

Under the direction of Dr. Valerie Stokes, LISW

Department of Social Work, Northwestern College

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Abstract

Systemic racism has been a part of American Culture for hundreds of generations, and while the United States has come a long way since the 17th century, there is still an overwhelming number of racial injustices happening today which go unaddressed. Due to a lack of diverse education, common misconceptions regarding white privilege, systemic racism, and racial injustice are taken as truth. To address these misconceptions and educate individuals, the organizers of this project researched, collaborated, and then hosted a Racial Injustice Prayer Vigil at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. This Racial Injustice Prayer Vigil had six different stations: Identity, Colorblindness, Prayer, Lament, Information, and Celebration. The purpose of the prayer vigil was to educate Northwestern Students on White Privilege, Systemic Racism, and Racial Injustice, and to have them self-reflect on their own identities. The overall goal of the project was to allow for more informed, meaningful conversations regarding diversity and racial injustice on campus as a way to combat negative misconceptions and promote social change. At the end of the prayer vigil, visitors were asked to fill out a survey with a list of questions regarding their experience. The organizers received primarily positive feedback, with the only critical feedback being more advertising, longer portion of time, and more flow from station to station. Apparent growth was also found in Appendix B which showed an increase in levels before and after the event in regard to their comfortability level participating in racial conversations.

Keywords: Prayer Vigil, Racial Injustice, Systemic Racism, White Privilege

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Addressing and Educating Northwestern Students on White Privilege and Systemic Racism**Literature Review & Introduction****Introduction:**

For this project, the organizers have chosen to focus on two specific social issues that are incredibly correlated in today's society. Both systemic racism and white privilege are affecting not only Black Americans in this country but affecting the perception of white people in America. One issue without the other does not get to the root of the issues and both have a hand in perpetuating the racial divide present in the United States today. Changing perceptions of privilege and learning more of the history of systemic racism in our nation is an important step forward towards healing and racial reconciliation. Both systemic racism and white privilege are "hot button" topics in today's political climate but are so relevant to the treatment of minorities in our modern society. Our nation's history of intolerance towards Black people has created a division and sustained this division with acts such as enslavement, segregation, denying voting rights, incarceration, racial profiling, and police brutality.

White Privilege:

Although efforts have been made to educate the general public on diversity in an attempt to foster more positive feelings, "Studies have found that attending university diversity courses, designed to increase awareness of privilege, did not improve white students' attitude towards people of color" (Hastie & Rimmington, 2014, p. 188). There is a distinct history of privilege in our country that prevents people in the majority or in more advanced groups from seeing others as equal or as deserving. Privilege also gives those in these dominant groups a sense of unearned superiority or a power over others in which they did nothing to deserve.

McIntosh (qtd. in Hastie & Rimmington) defines white privilege as "the 'invisible knapsack' of 'unearned assets' that members of dominant racial groups 'cash in' every day"

(2014, p. 187). The reason white privilege cannot be separated from the subject of systemic racism is due to the fact that “white privilege exists because of historic, enduring racism and biases. Therefore, defining white privilege also requires finding working definitions of racism and bias” (Collins, 2018). Unearned assets, as McIntosh described, are awarded to members of the dominant racial group due to past injustices and present prejudices placed on those who do not fit the phenotype of the dominant group. While white privilege is a touchy subject for most in the dominant group today, it is crucial not to assign blame in these conversations of privilege; rather, the goal is to get those in the majority to recognize their benefiting from these oppressive systems in place and seek out change and equity in today’s systems.

White privilege “allows you to assume a homogenisation of experience, whereby you are not required to have knowledge of the experiences of others, instead assuming you can understand others through the lens of your own (dominant) culture. There is no requirement to understand the practices of those with different identities within everyday life” (Hastie & Rimmington, 2014, p. 187). But what does this look like in everyday life? How is one to know the practices of those with differing identities? There is white privilege, along with systemic racism, present among many different aspects of societal living today such as: policing, incarceration, and education. There are far more areas affected by systemic racism and white privilege, but the statistics for these three areas are some of the most telling.

Along with white privilege, there is the concept of white fragility, which as Robin DiAngelo describes is the process of “emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and withdrawal from the stress-inducing situation” DiAngelo says these emotions “work to reinstate white equilibrium as they repel the challenge, return to our racial comfort, and maintain our dominance within the racial hierarchy” (2018, p. 2). White

supremacy and white fragility has been, in part, supported and sustained through Christianity. In research conducted by Robert P. Jones, the following was found:

In his research, Jones found a shockingly high relationship between white Christian identity and racist attitudes, including an inability to see structural racism. He noted that white Christians were essentially twice as likely as religiously unaffiliated Americans to say the killings of African American men are isolated incidents instead of a broader pattern (Crowe, 2020).

Amanda Tyler, executive director of Baptist Joint Commission, noted that Christian nationalism has played a strong role in the racial prejudices in today's society:

Christian nationalism acts a lot like racism – it's pervasive, insidious and infects all aspects of American life. Just like racism, we are all impacted by Christian nationalism, no matter our race, ethnicity, gender or religion. The way it shows up for us, though, varies by our perspective, experience and identity. And Christian nationalism, in the hands of white Christians, particularly those who feel threatened by changing culture and a perceived loss of power, can be particularly dangerous to those who are out of power, to the disenfranchised and vulnerable (Crowe, 2020).

Systemic Racism:

Feagin (qtd. in Simmons), asserts that “systemic racism includes a diverse assortment of racial practices: the unjustly gained economic and political power of whites; the continuing resource inequality; the rationalizing white-racist frame; and the major institutions created to preserve white privilege and power” (2013, p. 139).

Systemic racism exists in the treatment they face at the hands of law enforcement and their overrepresentation in the prison system. Young Black men, 15 to 19 years old, are 21 times

more likely to be shot and killed by police than white men their same age (Gabrielson et al., 2014). White privilege is prevalent here if one takes into consideration the fact that Black people make up only 13.4% of our nation's population, while white people make up about 76% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Keeping these statistics in mind, "Black men are six times as likely to be incarcerated as white men and Hispanic men are more than twice as likely to be incarcerated as non-Hispanic white men" (Criminal Justice Facts).

Systemic racism is also prevalent in our education system. In 2009, the top 468 colleges in the state's student populations were 75% white, although the amount of college-aged kids that were white was only 62% of the population (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013, p. 10). Even once enrolled in colleges, there appears to be a graduation gap of about 18%, with nearly 70% of white students earning a degree in six years, versus just slightly over half (51.5%) for both Black and Latino students (Nichols & Anthony, 2020).

Systemic racism exists in the health disparities between Black and white Americans. From 2008 to 2010, black Americans saw an increase in the number of those who went uninsured, from 22.1% to 26.2%, while white Americans only saw a small increase from 14.6% to 16.1% (CDC, 2013). With the current pandemic, black Americans are 2.6 times as likely to be diagnosed with COVID, 4.7 times as likely to be hospitalized from it, and 2.1 times more likely to die from COVID than white Americans (CDC, 2020). The infant death rate among Black Americans is 11 deaths per ever 1,000 live births, almost twice the national average of 5.8 (CAP, 2020, p. 2). These statistics may be due in part to the fact that Black Americans are typically living in more densely populated areas, with higher pollution and less access to health care.

As McIntosh also states, systemic racism is far more prevalent than just in colleges and prisons, it's a part of everyday life. McIntosh in her article that has been cited thousands of times

lists conditions that White Americans can count on that members of other races cannot. These include being able to “be in the company of people of my race most of the time”, “go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed”, and “go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair” (McIntosh, 1988, p. 2).

Although African American men and women are no longer enslaved, the maltreatment of Black people in America has long surpassed emancipation and has just taken on different forms.

A study done in 2009 found the following:

America would appear to represent a society where affluence and poverty are very real possibilities for whites, whereas for blacks, the American experience is captured by a staggering likelihood of encountering poverty during adulthood with little chance of attaining significant economic prosperity (Rank, 2009, p. 62).

And while much focus is on Black men and their encounters with racism and the police, another study found that in a sample of Black professionals regarding frequency and intensity of racism and stress relating to racism, “Black women are more likely to experience institutional and cultural racism than Black men” (Carter & Reynolds, 2011, p. 159). Another study looking at wealth and the United States housing system found that:

Structural racism in the U.S. housing system has contributed to stark and persistent racial disparities in wealth and financial well-being, especially between Black and white households...[I]f current trends continue, it could take more than 200 years for the average Black family to accumulate the same amount of wealth as its white counterpart (Solomon et al., 2019).

It is no secret that there is a racial divide in this country that has permeated our prison and justice system, our housing system, and even our education system. This divide has been a long part of American history and while some may argue that it is much better than it was, there is evidence to show that Black people are still being oppressed, only now in much more covert ways.

Demographics:

Understanding the project's target community and demographics ensures that the work impacts attendees in the most effective and influential way possible. The project's targeted audience is students at Northwestern College, and in order to gain data about this designated population, the organizers researched demographics on a macro level, and gradually narrowed them down more specifically, until information was found that pertained to this one particular community.

When the organizers began the search, it all started by researching demographics within the Midwest, and looked for data particularly about race and ethnicity. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that in 2018, the total population of the Midwest was 68,308,749 people. As organizers looked at race and ethnicity statistics, it was found that 75% of the Midwest identified as White, 10% identified as Black, 0% identified as Islander, 2% identified with two or more races and/or ethnicities, 1% identified as Native, 3% identified as Asian, 8% identified as Hispanic, and 0% identified as other (<https://censusreporter.org/>, 2020). The organizers also discovered that in 2018, the Midwest was 51% female and 49% male, and the median age was 38.6 years (<https://censusreporter.org/>, 2018).

After the organizers researched data pertaining to the Midwest, data was narrowed down to the state of Iowa. The organizers first discovered that in 2019, the population of Iowa was

3,155,070 (<https://www.census.gov/>, 2019). The U.S. Census Bureau provided information from 2019 regarding “Race and Hispanic Origin” (<https://www.census.gov/>, 2019), and this data was used to learn about racial demographics within Iowa. According to the site, 90.6% of the population identified as white alone, 4.1% identified as Black or African American alone, 0.5% identified as American Indian and Alaska Native alone, 2.7% identified as Asian alone, 0.2% identified as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, 6.3% identified as Hispanic or Latino, 85.0% identified as White alone and not Hispanic or Latino, and 2.0% identified as belonging to two or more races (<https://www.census.gov/>, 2019). Since Northwestern College is located in rural Iowa, the organizers looked up statistics pertaining to this as well. One source states that according to a 2018 study, 35.7% of Iowa’s population is considered to be rural (<https://www.iowadatacenter.org/>, 2019).

Once the organizers found the information needed for Iowa, the search was narrowed down to the county that Northwestern College resides in, Sioux County. The U.S. Census Bureau states that in 2019, an estimated 34,855 people reside in Sioux County (<https://www.census.gov/>, 2019). This source also provided information regarding Sioux County’s Race and Hispanic Origin demographics as well. It states that in 2019, 96.8% of Sioux County’s population identified as White alone, 0.8% identified as Black alone, 0.6% identified as American Indian and Alaska Native alone, 0.9% identified as Asian alone, 0.1% identified as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, 11.2% identified as Hispanic or Latino, 86.5% identified as being White alone and not Hispanic or Latino, and 0.8% identified with two or more races (<https://www.census.gov/>, 2019).

After looking into information about Sioux County, the organizers finally narrowed down their search to look at the target population - students at Northwestern College. According to

Northwestern's website, 1,546 students are enrolled in the 2020-2021 academic school year, and within this population, they have "13% undergraduate ethnic minority students" (<https://nwcsiowa.edu/>, 2020), as well as 35 states and 19 countries represented (<https://nwcsiowa.edu/>, 2020). Information from the U.S. Department of Education also states that in the 2018-2019 school year, 83% of Northwestern's students identified as White, 1% identified as Asian, 2% identified as Black, 4% identified as Hispanic, 3% identified as International, 2% identified with two or more races, and 4% identified as being unknown (<https://www.google.com/>, 2019).

These demographics are relevant to this study, as they allow the organizers to consider racial and ethnic diversity represented in the Midwest, the state of Iowa, Sioux County, and Northwestern College. This knowledge allowed organizers to better understand the population the organizers will be presenting to, ensuring that the information is as pertinent and effective as possible.

Barriers to Problem Resolution:

According to much of the literature, a barrier to fighting the awareness of white privilege and systematic racism are the feelings that many white people feel in reaction, including white guilt, white shame and learned helplessness (Kyrölä, 2017; Moore, 2018). Some may even go as far as to say that learning about their privilege as "threatening" (Phillips & Lowry, 2015). As these are widely debated, abstract concepts, it is especially hard to find a solution to unite behind. One suggestion to avoid white people writing off talk about white privilege and related topics is in the way racial inequity is framed, "either in terms of dominant- group privilege or subordinate-group disadvantage" (Lowry, Knowles & Unzueta, 2007, 1237). This combats one of the most common responses to white privilege that the organizers have personally heard,

which is “I grew up poor, so I don’t have all the privileges either”. By framing it as a subordinate-group disadvantage, it eliminates the effectiveness of that rebuttal. This does come with its own problems, because practicing this way could be furthering white guilt and over-compensating for such. With this information in mind, organizers can create a program that engages the target audience well in order to educate on the facts of the larger problem.

In general, people have a tendency to avoid topics that make them uncomfortable (Sweeny, Melnyk, Miller & Shepperd, 2010). Sweeny et. al. states “[a]lthough information can bring wealth, power, enlightenment, comfort, and opportunity, information can also lead to unpleasant or undesired outcomes,” and in the case of this problem, learning about problems systematic racism causes and the harm white guilt can bring, may drive people to avoid conversation altogether (342). This particular article does not speak directly about white privilege or systemic racism, however, in an article by Conway et. al. this connection is made (Conway, Lipsey, Pogge & Ratliff, 2017). Two reasons for this would be because it challenges a person’s beliefs and values and can cause unpleasant emotions (Sweeny et. al., 2010, 343-344). The trick, as mentioned before, is that these uncomfortable emotions are part of the changing process and are only effectively pacified to another’s detriment. With the political climate of 2020 along with instigating events mentioned later, racism has become a politicized, divisive topic. This barrier goes along with topic avoidance as values inform political stance and when those values are challenged, it may feel like a whole part of their identity is challenged. This is not only a part of their political identity, but also their racial identity too (Conway et. al.). These are some expected or possible barriers the organizers will consider while planning the community event.

Past History/Events:

Systemic racism goes far back in America's history to the very beginning stages of the North American colonies. "To satisfy the labor needs of the rapidly growing North American colonies, white European settlers turned in the early 17th century from indentured servants (mostly poorer Europeans) to a cheaper, more plentiful labor source: enslaved Africans. After 1619, when a Dutch ship brought 20 Africans ashore at the British colony of Jamestown, Virginia, slavery spread quickly through the American colonies." Events such as *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, Rosa Parks and the Bus Boycott in 1955, Martin Luther King Junior's "I have a dream" speech in 1963 followed by his assassination, and the "Voting Rights Act of 1965" have made it abundantly clear systemic racism has been both an ongoing social and political issue in our society (History.com, 2020).

Currently, "It has been over forty years since the mostly successful conclusion of the Civil Rights movement in the United States," and while these events did promote change and help form the America we see today, we as a society still have a long way to go to achieve true equality (Clare, 2016). One notable achievement towards equality in our legal system was in 2001, when "George W. Bush appointed Powell as secretary of state, making him the first African American to serve as America's top diplomat." Perhaps one of the most pinnacle moments for the African American community was on January 20, 2009, when Barack Obama was inaugurated as the 44th president of the United States, becoming the first African American to hold that office (History.com, 2020). He held his position as President for 8 years, serving two terms, and during that time accomplished many things including health care reform, improved food safety system, and ended the war in Iraq (Washmonthly, 2016).

Current Nation-Wide Events:

According to Quillian, “From childhood we are inundated with images that convey racial inequality in American society. The images originate from the media and our personal observations, and both represent actual inequality and constructive inequality that includes stereotypical distortions.” From these images people learn at a very young age the racial stereotypes that African-Americans are more impoverished, get in trouble with the law, and hold lower positions of authority than whites (Quillian, 2008). “While some may have thought the election of an African-American president in 2008 heralded a “post racial” America, continued violence and oppression has brought about a rebirth of activism, embodied by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement” (Clare, 2016). “The BLM movement, born in 2013, was indirectly created out of decades of frustration within the African-American community over the legal system’s continual exoneration of those who had taken black lives.” It first started as a “result of the not-guilty verdict against George Zimmerman, who stalked and killed Trayvon Martin, a seventeen-year-old black youth” all because he thought the youth was in the wrong part of town in Sanford, Florida (Clare, 2016) (History.com, 2020). Three female activists in the African-American community, Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi, decided that something had to be done in response to this outrage (History.com, 2020). “Due to their drive and to further instances of black lives being taken, with ensuing rebellions in cities like Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore, Maryland, the movement has quickly taken off” and currently “has approximately two dozen chapters throughout the United States as well as chapters in Ghana and Canada” (Clare, 2016).

The Black Lives Matter movement has recently grown and “swelled to a critical juncture on May 25, 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 epidemic when 46-year-old George Floyd died

after being handcuffed and pinned to the ground by police officer Derek Chauvin” (History.com, 2020). This came after two other African American high-profile cases:

On February 23, 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery was killed while out on a run after being followed by three white men in a pickup truck. And on March 13, 26-year-old EMT Breonna Taylor, was shot eight times and killed after police broke down the door to her apartment while executing a nighttime warrant (History.com, 2020).

The day after George Floyd’s death, rioters and “protestors in Minneapolis took to the streets to protest Floyd’s killing. Police cars were set on fire and officers released tear gas to disperse crowds” (History.com, 2020). According to *The New York Times*, “protests have erupted in at least 140 cities across the United States, and the National Guard has been activated in at least 21 states” since the killing of George Floyd (Taylor, 2020).

So is Black Lives Matter a movement or an organization or simply a concept? In reality, Black Lives Matter can fall under all three of these categories. Black Lives Matter as a concept can be defined as “a political and social movement originating among African Americans, emphasizing basic human rights and racial equality for Black people and campaigning against various forms of racism” (Dictionary.com, 2020). According to the organization’s website:

Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc is a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives.

As for the movement Black Lives Matter, that is simply up for interpretation from person to person as “...BLM uses a form of ‘distributed’ framing whereby proponents, and critics, can attach their

own meanings to the movement (Rojas, 2020).” It also explains from the poll survey mentioned, “Studies of public opinion and cultural change suggest a mixed view of BLM,” making for a wide range of those for it, against it, and some who simply do not understand the movement’s goals. The poll study mentioned in the article “suggests that BLM does have an important effect on American society, though it may fall short of the goals found in the movement’s more exuberant statements” (Rojas, 2020).

Local Events in Sioux County:

On June 5, 2020, the people of Orange City, IA, participated in a “Partnering for Justice Walk” as a form of a peaceful protest. According to the Northwest Iowa Review, “In light of the death of George Floyd and other evidence of systemic racial injustice, a number of Orange City area residents felt called to express their common desire for justice” (Northwest Iowa Review, June 3, 2020). This walk started at the Northwestern College Bultman Center, proceeded downtown Orange City and ended at the Windmill Park where a short program was held “as well as an opportunity for participants to express their frustration and/or hope creatively using sidewalk chalk” (Northwest Iowa Review, June 3, 2020). One of the organizers, Rahn Franklin of Orange City states, “This opportunity to flourish has not been made evident for all people—especially our black and brown brothers and sisters...Our demonstration seeks to bring light to the situation because our liberation is tied up in the liberation of the most vulnerable in our midst. We can, and we will, do better, together.” This event was limited to the local individuals of Orange City and abided by the appropriate COVID-19 protocol (Northwest Iowa Review, June 3, 2020).

In another article also from the Northwest Iowa Review, author Judy Hauswald addresses “the hate and prejudice that resides” in Sioux Center, IA. It states that while the majority of the

population is white and have not been the object of racism, this is simply not the case for their “neighbors of color.” Hauswald describes three different situations that have happened in the last two months alone in Sioux Center. The first situation happened back in August, when a brother and sister who were part of a group of young adults selling cleaning products in Sioux Center, were verbally attacked with racial slurs by a white man. The author explains this “company had gone through the proper channels to get a permit to work here, as they had in summers past. My neighbors witnessed a white man from our neighborhood driving around the block in his pickup, shouting racial slurs at these two Black siblings, slurs that included the N-word” (Northwest Iowa Review, Oct. 9, 2020).

The second situation mentioned was about a Latino couple who “were on their morning walk on the bike trail near the hospital. On two separate occasions this summer, the same white car slowed down along B40 and passengers yelled racial insults at them.” The couple have been documented residents in Sioux County for more than twenty years, work in Sioux Center, and own a home there. They are also “respected leaders in their church. But now they are fearful about their safety just taking a walk” (Northwest Iowa Review, Oct. 9, 2020). The third situation involves a Latino high school freshman and her friend being insulted by a middle schooler for being Mexican. This happened at a recent Sioux Center football game she attended with her friend, who were both born in the United States, the children of Mexican immigrants. The article states:

A middle school student, dressed in a Trump 2020 outfit complete with Trump decals on her face, approached them and insulted them about being Mexican. When they ignored her, she boldly said, “I’m talking to you ...” This kind of hate speech should have no home here (Northwest Iowa Review, Oct. 9, 2020).

The title of the article, “Advocates needed to stop area racism,” explains the point Hauswald is trying to make here. She states, “It is not enough to say, ‘I’m not racist, and I would never say or do such things.’ We have to be anti-racist. We have to speak out whenever we see or hear hurtful behavior because no one deserves to be treated in these ways” (Northwest Iowa Review, Oct. 9, 2020). The author urges readers to consider these three situations, share the column with family and friends, and discuss how you can advocate for others.

Planning Decisions

Type of Community Project:

The organizers decided that an awareness campaign by way of prayer vigil would be the best type of organizing in order to reach set goals. This campaign was implemented to start conversations on campus around racial injustice as well as being informative with facts and statistics. More people than just those with a diversity-type class were able to attend.

Intervention Goals and Objectives:

The event was organized in order to meet the objective of defining systemic racism and white privilege. To do so, the organizers created a station that would provide that information in the form of statistics, infographics and literature, along with social media accounts to follow to expand the participants' views. This was intended to lessen the burden of those who experience racial injustice by not making them explain it over and over. The organizers hoped to create this baseline of information that other conversations can breed from.

The organizers wanted to also create a program that had talking points that people could continue, along with how it fits with the Christian faith. This was due to the target audience of Northwestern students who are predominantly white and /or Christians according to Northwestern admission statistics (nwciowa.edu/about/quick-facts, 2020). This event was not

meant to be the end-all information session for racial injustice, but rather a starting point to launch from.

Method of Engagement:

The organizers of this project used an “information from select individuals from the community” approach in deciding what the event should look like. The organizers first looked to established organizations on campus, like La Mosaic, which is a group that fosters conversations where everyone is heard and safe. Kevin McMahan is a part of the intercultural development department and was also a resource along with the student leaders of La Mosaic, Neftalí Ramierz and Jonathan Johnson. The organizers also met with the Dean of Christian formation, Mark DeYounge, as chapel services had just included racial conversations in their curriculum. After meeting with these two groups on campus, the organizers decided to chart their own path and talk about the racial injustices in a way that hasn’t been done in recent years.

Then, the organizers started modeling the event after another event on campus, but with the intention to specifically target racial injustice as a topic. After discussing the event with a few of the people they had already talked to, as well as some people suggested to them by their instructor, Dr. Valerie Stokes, they were encouraged to continue planning the event in this way. For the information at the event itself, secondary data research was conducted and Treyla Lee, Kevin McMahan, and Pastor Brian Keepers were all resources or speakers at the event.

Method of strategy/marketing:

The group examined many different avenues in marketing the event and what the event should look like. The organizers marketing strategy relied heavily on social media, with the event having both an Instagram and a Facebook page created. On these sites, the organizers posted starting the Monday of the week of the event information surrounding systemic racism

and white privilege in American society. On both of the social media platforms, information was posted and a hashtag was added to the post in order for others to share the information and lead those who click on the hashtag to the page. The organizers' hope was that with more information out on social media, the issue of racism and white privilege in this country would be on everyone's minds that week, leading to more buzz surrounding the upcoming event. The idea was to create a gradual lead-up to the event, in which people will be able to reflect on what they have learned and come together in prayer.

As college students, the organizing group was very aware of how big a role social media plays in college students' lives and how predominantly all Northwestern students are on Instagram and or Facebook. It is something most students check daily and creating the event's own page and being able to follow and have others follow allows for easy transferring of information to a large number of college students. Especially on Instagram and Facebook where others can reshare posts or stories made by the organizers advertising the event or daily information. Originally, the organizers wanted to also include daily challenges, but decided against this as there was little way to show if the challenges have been completed. Instead, links were provided to additional resources in the posts that students can read on their own time.

The organizers chose to hold the event in Christ Chapel, the space was big enough to permit social distancing in the midst of a global pandemic and provide easy flow from station to station. The chapel has also hosted prayer labyrinths and "Alone Together" services similar to what the organizers were hoping to accomplish before, so students were somewhat familiar with the process and every student had easy access to the event space. One of the organizers created a poster design that was printed out, with the help of faculty on campus, and put up in every residence hall and apartment building, as well as well-trafficked areas on campus such as the

library, Ramaker, and Van Peurse hall. The posters included information about social media sites so people can follow the event's pages and get more information about the event and be educated on racism and privilege as well.

Method of organizing:

As previously mentioned, the group decided to engage Northwestern's campus-wide community by creating a prayer vigil based around the topic of racial injustice. The group went through several drafts of creating and finalizing the plan, while constantly revising ideas and techniques for the event. After many meetings, the organizers finally concluded that they would create a prayer vigil event that would involve individual and group prayers, in order to engage attendees through various methods. The group planned for the event to take place on Thursday, November 12, from 8:30-9:30 in Christ Chapel. For the first $\frac{3}{4}$ of the hour, students would visit six stations around the chapel, where they would have opportunities to engage in self-reflection, prayers, and hear speakers share about diversity and white privilege, individually.

After the self-reflection portion of the service, all attendees came together for the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ of the time, while maintaining social distance, to gather together for a group blessing, prayer, and the singing of the doxology. Once the group had the structure of the prayer vigil outlined, the organizers began to allocate tasks to members of the group, as well as members outside of the group. This allowed the organizers to divide up the work in manageable ways that allowed them to ensure that all the tasks were completed. The list below outlines tasks that were divided and completed in order to effectively organize the event. They will be organized by tasks that each person was in charge of, as well as tasks that the whole group completed as well.

- Calli:
 - Made an AV request for the chapel space. (This was for the organizers to receive help with sound, lighting, and the Zoom call with one of the speakers, Treyla)

- Create social media and poster graphic
- Created a link tree link for the prayer vigil and survey to be taken through a QR Code
- Brought supplies for the vigil from home for decorating purposes
- Bailey:
 - Created and ran @racial_injustice_prayer_vigil Instagram account, promoting the event over the course of the week
 - Created slides of information to be posted during the week of the prayer vigil for Facebook and Instagram
 - Reserved Christ Chapel from 5:50pm-9:30pm
 - Purchased material for the vigil for decorating purposes
- Rachel:
 - Created and ran NWC Racial Injustice Prayer Vigil page on Facebook, promoting the event over the course of the week
 - Emailed students involved in the theatre department about the prayer vigil event
 - Was the main communicator with speaker, Treyla Lee, and assisted her in getting connected via Zoom
 - Brought materials to the vigil for decorating purposes
- Hannah:
 - Sent graphic to printing services to be made into physical posters
 - Emailed RDs promoting the event
 - Created signs labeling which station is which by their titles
 - Created a list of resources to be shared in the information station and online through the QR Code
 - Led the doxology
 - Brought material to the vigil for decorating purposes
- Tasks done by all:
 - Hung up posters around campus
 - All emailed various leaders on and off campus, requesting their involvement in the vigil through praying, zooming, or other methods (including Kevin McMann,

Rahn Franklin, Neftali Ramirez, Jon Johnson, Martha Draayer, Ali Almail, Treyla Lee, Brian Keepers, and others)

- Set up and tore down the six prayer stations
- Conducted research to inform the creation of the event and to include in each station
- Purchased or brought physical items to be used during the event (writing utensils, paper, string lights, string, bowls/baskets, mirrors, books, etc.)
- Reviewed, approved of, and modified work done by one another, in order to ensure that the event was done well

By looking at the list above, it is clear that there were many tasks and subtasks involved in hosting the Racial Injustice prayer vigil. Dividing them between the group members was an effective way for the event to come together in the most efficient way possible.

Finally, it is important to understand how the event adhered to safety measures regarding the current pandemic. The team used several different methods in order to ensure the safety of all attending. First, the organizers required the wearing of masks at the event, and that they be worn properly over the mouth and nose. Second, the group spread the six individual stations around the chapel in order to provide well over six feet of distance between them. Third, a hand sanitizing station was set up in the middle of the chapel, where participants could clean their hands if they so desired. Fourth, attendees were asked to appropriately distance themselves when gathered together for the large group prayer at the end. And finally, one of the event's speakers, Treyla, Zoomed in to the vigil instead of physically attending. While these measures would typically not be taken before the pandemic, the need for them added another, crucial layer to the organization of the event itself, in that their addition allowed the event to take place.

Defense for methods:

The organizers wanted to do something meaningful and demonstrative for the student community at Northwestern in order to protest racial discrimination and promote racial social

justice. They also wanted to inform individuals and debunk assumptions about racial issues. They did this by providing information as well as defining the social terms racial injustice, systemic racism, white privilege, and color blindness. The organizers thought about doing a peaceful protest march, however, COVID-19 concerns were raised as social distancing guidelines would be harder for people to follow across town. They also wanted this to be a time of self-reflection, prayer, and lament, so they chose to host a prayer vigil.

According to Ratliff & Hall (2014), prayer and vigils are considered a type of “Solemnity and the Sacred” form of protest. The authors describe vigils as “Events where sacred activity is the primary focus” and “are rarely responded to by police with force or presence. Solemnity usually provides a distinct quietness or stillness, changing the energy, description, and interpretation of such events” (Ratliff & Hall, 2014, p. 278). One primary example the authors gave was “the vigils and candle lighting protests held on the anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq” where “thousands of protesters across the United States gathered to hold vigils and read names of the dead in order to show support for the troops but protest the War” (Ratliff & Hall, 2014, p. 282).

Another example which suggests the effectiveness of prayer vigils comes from the 2016 Orlando nightclub shooting at a gay dance club in Florida as pundits blamed the perpetrator’s Muslim identity for his hateful act resulting in increases of Islamophobia. As a result, “vigils across the United States offered forums for Muslim Americans and other groups to publicly express their shared grief and to address homophobia and Islamophobia together” (Perkins, 2019, p. 27). “Responses to the Orlando tragedy heightened the visibility of LGBTIQ Muslims, presenting opportunities for this doubly marginalized minority to advocate for their belonging in the larger Muslim community” (Perkins, 2019, p. 27).

The organizers wanted the prayer vigil to be an event where all could come together to show their support and celebration of diversity, while also silently protesting, praying, learning, and lamenting over the racial injustices, white privilege, and systemic racism in the United States. Their hope was to heighten the visibility of racial injustice so others would start sharing the information they learned and start advocating for racial justice.

The organizers decided to also use a co-learning education method, by means of an awareness campaign along with the prayer vigil to provide information and raise awareness about racial injustice, systemic racism, and white privilege. According to the research from Ford (2012), white students are likely to have minimal contact with people of differing racial background prior to college and therefore “white students may enter college in different stages of development with respect to their understanding of and engagement with race, especially with whiteness” (p. 138).

Once in college, white students’ increased contact with students of color alone may not result in race related attitudinal or behavioral changes as meaningful cross-racial friendships are often limited. Moreover, white students and students of color typically “talk past one another” in race-related classroom discussions; honest conversations about race are hindered by fears of conflict, a climate of political correctness, and inexperience with effective models of inter- and intraracial dialogue (Ford, 2012, p. 138).

Ford explains representational racial diversity in colleges is not enough at this moment in time, rather, he urges for the proper “identity development of young men and women, colleges/universities must also productively utilize interactional diversity, with an emphasis on issues of power, privilege, and social justice, to realize its intended benefits” (Ford, 2012 p. 138).

By using an Intergroup Dialogue pedagogy method, or teaching, Ford found this

intergroup learning method “is demonstrably effective in attaining desired student learning outcomes related to engagement with racial identity and social justice” (2012, p. 154). His method achieved impressive results.

Students not only gain new knowledge about social and cultural diversity, but more importantly, they learn to interact effectively and collaboratively within and across social identities; and just as importantly, through a co-learning model, they learn to interrogate their own values in relation to those of others” (Ford, 2012, p. 154).

The organizers applied this co-learning model by creating an informative awareness campaign along with a prayer vigil to provide information and raise awareness about racial injustice, systemic racism, and white privilege .Since all four of the organizers identify as white females, they decided to consult and collaborate with individuals who differed from themselves to strategize how to make a diversely welcome environment for all students. As a result, the organizers organized several differing stations at the prayer vigil as a way to be inclusive to everyone with the following themes: Celebration, Identity, Lament, Prayer Request, Information, and Addressing Colorblindness.

The target population was college students at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, with both the awareness campaign and prayer vigil inclusive for all Northwestern students so they could co-learn these topics, how it pertains to them, and go through the stations, together. The organizers hoped by doing this it would create more meaningful and effective conversations about race across diverse populations at Northwestern College, such as the research results from Ford (2012) suggests.

Intervention

The event was a prayer vigil type atmosphere with both individual reflection as well as speaker-led group prayers. It was comprised of 6 stations: Lament, Celebration, Identity, Colorblindness, Information, and Prayer Requests. At the lament station, participants were encouraged to write a prayer of lament on a sticky note and post it next to a definition of what lament was. The prayer requests station was similar, but participants were encouraged to decide how they needed to pray, whether they needed to confess a wrong doing, petition using prayer to cry out to God or other sorts of prayer that they felt led. This station had the participants write the prayers on index cards and hang them up on a string with other prayers. The identity station contained mirrors the participants could look into and reflect on questions of identity and who they were in relation to the bigger world and God's plan for it. The information station was packed full of statistics and definitions about racial inequality and injustice as well as resources to confront white privilege. The color blindness station had Kevin McMahn, a faculty member in the intercultural department at Northwestern, talk about color blindness and how God gives us sight to see God's diverse creation and live into it. Our celebration station was led by a guest speaker Treyla Lee and talked about the recipe of diversity, with each letter representing a different ingredient about how to live in a way that celebrates diversity. See Appendix A for photos of the event, along with some of the social media posts the organizers posted the week leading up to the event.

Evaluation and Reflection

Major Results:

The organizers' event took place on Thursday, November 12th from 8:30-9:30 at Christ Chapel on Northwestern College's campus, approximately 40 people attended in person and 5

online. The online social media pages received a total of 20-30 “likes” and “interested” responses to posts. The title of the event was officially “Racial Injustice Prayer Vigil”. A few goals that the team wished to achieve was to define “systemic racism” and “white privilege”, as well as start conversations amongst Northwestern students about these topics, as well as what it looks like to be passionate about these things and hold faith close. The defining terms goals were both met by both our information station that included a definition of both as well as other stations that demonstrated different applications of those definitions. The other goal of having people talk about it on campus was harder to measure, however, we had a survey that everyone that attended was encouraged to fill out at the end, which had a question attempting to measure this. The survey question read “How comfortable were you engaging in racial conversations BEFORE this event?” and “How comfortable do you feel now AFTER the event in engaging in racial conversations?” where growth happened (Appendix B). While surveys aren’t perfect indicators of true feelings, it was anonymous, so people were encouraged to answer how they really felt. From these two things, the organizers felt as though they met their goals at this event/online portion.

Racial injustice has been a hot issue coming out of the summer of 2020. Northwestern’s chapel in the fall semester has been talking about divisive or taboo issues and also addressed racism and racial injustice. The organizers wanted to continue this conversation in a way that was tangible and accessible; in a way that people could learn and not just talked at. This event was meant to be a memorable way to honor those who we have lost, ask for forgiveness, but also to make this big huge topic personal. A lot of the chapels Northwestern has had the fall semester have been people sharing their stories and something to do about it, but this event challenged

individuals to think and reflect about their lives personally. In that way, the organizers positively contributed to social change by providing an additional side to the social issue of racial injustice.

The tactic of a prayer vigil event was conducive to what the organizers wished to achieve. The social media platforms were also effective, as people spend time on social media and might have seen advertising for the event on there and read some of the posts for that information, almost 74% of the participants at the event had read at least one social media post beforehand. The social media platforms also allowed for people to push back on the event, like someone chose to do on Instagram. This allowed the organizers to have a conversation with someone who didn't agree with what we were doing which is always helpful to confirming how to do things. The feedback was overall positive, and the results of the survey showed that a majority of people in attendance learned something. One thing that could always be improved was attendance, but with 2020 being a weird year for an in-person event as well as unforeseen events on the team, the organizers still thought the event was well attended. Doing more work convincing established entities on campus would have been helpful for advertising purposes, as well as including it as a chapel credit always gets people to events. There are pros and cons of using chapel credits to entice people into coming such as there would be more people that disagree with the message which is both a pro and con, and the people that were at the event wanted to be there for the most part which made for a safe place for people to discuss their opinions.

In the survey, there was a section for favorite parts as well as a section for what could be done to improve. Several people (5 of the survey respondents, plus a few people that we heard from informally) really enjoyed the celebration station that Treyla Lee led over zoom, celebrating that we are different. The organizers agreed and thought that Treyla did a great job! In addition, there were comments about the information station. One attendee mentioned that

they “see the statistics and research, and I know it’s real, I just don’t want to believe it. I do believe it, but I don’t want it to be true because I want to change it, but I don’t know what I can do about it” This might have been something the event could have improved on, we did have a list of social media accounts to follow for further information but there was so much there that it would have been hard to digest and actually make change. Improving the “Now what?” feel to the event would have been something that was helpful and would have been fairly simple with some planning. The other improvement people asked for was more time at the event, which was very encouraging, because it showed people wanted to engage with the information.

The organizers measured success by the survey and from what others have told them. One of the speakers, Treyla, also told the organizers that this was a good event and that they should be proud, which meant a lot. As mentioned before, much of the feedback the organizers got on the event was positive, none of the feedback on how to improve was detrimental to the idea of the event and was truly just ways to improve the event if it would be done again in the future. At least one person mentioned to the organizers that “they were so excited because they had been waiting for someone to do an event like this on campus” as well as feedback on the survey saying, “It’s just beautiful to know people on campus care and want to talk about racial injustice.” The link for the results to this survey is: <https://forms.gle/RQL3wiXzqeZk7PVv7>.

Reflection:

A concept that the organizers found helpful was the rational problem solving method and its concept of “identifying the problem”. Although at first the organizers had ignored this method due to the complexity of the issue, the formulation of the problem proved incredibly helpful. According to Brueggeman, “The problem should be meaningful, and solving it should have beneficial effects” (113). The process of appropriately identifying the problem involves choosing

one in which there can be a successful resolution, the group has legitimate interest in the matter, has some control, and is pressing and current (Brueggeman, pp. 113-114). The organizers learned that although the action-social model and social thinking are more modern ways of thinking and acting out strategies, it may be beneficial to start from the basics and work one's way into more abstract thinking.

The organizers also had hands-on experience with "networking for social purpose" (Brueggeman, p. 163). Although many college students today use their social media platforms to post latte art or doodles, social media and its vast network can be used for the common good. Although the idea of spreading information via social networks is not a new concept to these organizers, having the experience showed them the impact it can have and how many people it can reach. As one of the speakers, Treyla said, "All information is going to be good information." And bringing statistics and graphs into the public eye can stir up something in people and lead to a desire for change.

Due to Covid-19, the organizers were also able to utilize "Virtual Community Organizing," by bringing in Treyla via Zoom to be both a source of information for the organizers and a speaker at the prayer vigil. Brueggeman explains this concept as "expanding the capacity to help members of these communities engage one another in identifying and acting on a variety of social problems in ways that have never been possible" (Brueggeman, 165). With social distancing and Covid-19 guidelines on campus, it was much easier for Treyla to speak with groups of individuals with technology rather than in person with a mask as they were able to see her facial expressions and allowed for engaging "people in dialogue and discussion over long distances" (Brueggeman, 165). Treyla was a God-send to the organizers as she also provided additional guidance, information, and support in the overall planning process. While

Brueggeman warns of a type of “echo chamber” this can create where “Instead of having to listen to and confront people with different views, people can simply interact with those who think the same way,” this was not the case for the organizers project as it was more to inform and educate individuals (Brueggeman, 165).

Overall, the organizers learned about building “Communal Solidarity” between diverse groups of college students on campus. They developed an idea for a prayer vigil which allowed for prayer, lament, reflection, identity, education, and celebration of diversity. This allowed individuals who attended the vigil to form a type of learning group that could identify issues and in doing so were “simultaneously creating an internal culture of communal solidarity” (Brueggeman, 249). This included confronting and discussing “a set of shared assumptions and ways of thinking, interpreting, and speaking about the world” which the organizers hoped would lead to more conversations with other individuals outside of those who attended the event. The organizers goal was based on Brueggeman, which “is to help members forge themselves into a community of moral discourse, see themselves as a community of empowerment, and become a justice-seeking community of neighbors” (Brueggeman, 249).

Action Plan

Community Action Plan:

The organizers felt as though the event was put on successfully and saw that it did have an impact on those who attended. While campus has begun to take serious steps toward racial reconciliation and acknowledging white privilege, there are many more conversations that need to be had. Upon speaking with Mark DeYounge, there are events and activities in the works for

next spring that will aid in the education of students on campus that the organizers are hopeful those who attended the prayer vigil will attend and greatly benefit from.

Since the organizers did find there to be some significant results and reactions from the events, the organizers strongly believe that both students, groups on campus and campus as a whole, and the overall community will greatly benefit from continuing to speak on racial injustices. At the individual level, by initiating these hard conversations students on campus indicated that they now feel more comfortable engaging in these types of conversations. Individuals now have more information at their fingertips to competently and compassionately listen to the stories of others. For students of color, the event served as a reminder that they are seen and valued members of Northwestern's campus.

After the success of the event, other groups on campus may be encouraged to partake in more difficult conversations around other social injustices or "hot button" issues that college students are encouraged not to speak on as a means to keep the peace. These conversations however have lasting impacts on the student body and campus as a whole. Northwestern consistently prides itself on its Raider Family, however if individuals in the family do not feel as though they can speak their truths or give their take, that is an indication that there is something flawed within the family system. It is the organizers' hope that after this event more groups on campus will partake in these difficult conversations and show themselves to be formidable allies and student leaders against injustice. The organizers also envision that campus will continue to engage in these discussions for a long time to come.

Given the political climate of Orange City, fruitful conversations of this nature may be hard to come by. These conversations are nevertheless important to be having. The organizers

reached out to pastor Brian of Trinity Reformed Church and were able to see the work he is doing in his congregation and his heart for justice. The organizers believe that with more conversations and direct confrontation of the ways in which society works against people of color, Orange City as a whole may become a more welcoming place for all. No one is naive enough to believe that a couple conversations will change the ways of everyone, however it paves a way forward and creates space at the table for Black and Brown voices to be heard and appreciated.

Action Plan:

As previously noted, Northwestern has taken great steps this semester in addressing racial injustice and white privilege. A good next step for campus would be to continue having these conversations whether that be in D-groups, All Hall meetings, or more chapel events to come. It will be important for Northwestern's campus to continue talking about these difficult issues, however it does not always need to be in a way that is so public and for some almost mandatory if they are running low on chapel credits. These conversations should be held in more intimate spaces where people have the opportunity to share. Groups on campus such as La Mosaic and the International Club are already working towards engaging students in open and vulnerable conversations. Unfortunately, the issue of race is one that frequently turns people off and one consistently hears about the "race card" being overplayed. Perhaps a better next step for NWC is focused more on identity and appreciating one another's differences. Whereas race may turn people off and may seem too political for some, identity and appreciation applies to a much broader range of people and thus cannot be shut down so quickly. It would be interesting to see D-groups engage in a bible study centered around concepts such as those presented in our mirror station.

Northwestern should continue to uplift the voices of those who have chronically been oppressed. Allowing people of color and those in the minority to speak is a gift to campus and allows people to hear perspectives they never have before. It is important to note that although Black voices are more than qualified to speak on racial injustices, this should not be the only topic in which they are asked to speak on. Instead, inviting voices in to speak on other matters they are passionate about as well like spiritual health, immigration, sexuality, etc. As a follow up, the organizers will be sending this completed document on to Campus Ministries, I-Club, and La Mosaic.

Intervention Strategies:

The organizers have talked to many staff and students and compiled a list of practical next steps the campus should consider taking in order to provide a safe space to speak on issues such as racial injustice and white privilege, as well as introducing students on campus to other points of view and different cultures. These steps include:

- Creating book clubs and allowing people on campus to educate themselves on these issues and gather to talk about them.
- Inviting in more diverse speakers to talk with students about more issues than just race.
- More cultural representation in the Cafeteria food provided to students.
- Talk with friends about what they learned from the event and what is in the news today.

- Engaging in advocacy whether that be online or in person.

Appendices

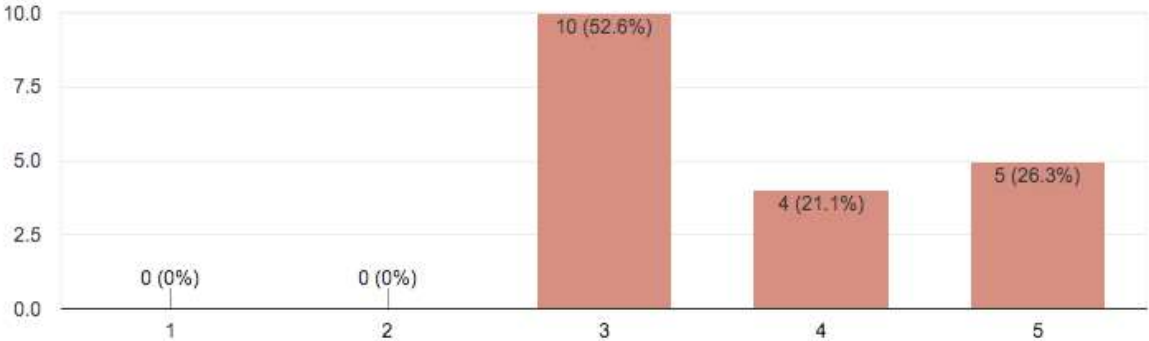
Appendix A:



Appendix B:

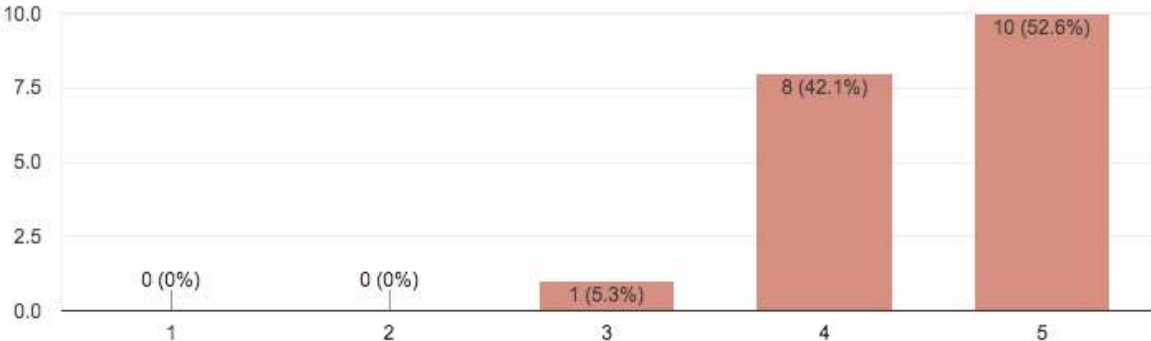
How comfortable were you engaging in racial conversations BEFORE this event?

19 responses



How comfortable do you feel now AFTER the event in engaging in racial conversations?

19 responses



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