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The play was centered on a relationship in which Jamal is verbally abusive and has a very low respect level for all women, but especially his girlfriend Mona. Mona puts up with this obnoxious behavior and allows Jamal to disrespect her because of the prestige that goes with dating Jamal. It isn’t until Malik, (the character who I played) attempts to enlighten her about her self-value and how women should be treated and spoken to with respect.

After her interaction with Malik, and watching firsthand how one of her “friends” attempts a sexual encounter with her player-minded boyfriend, Mona begins to look at herself, how she communicates with the opposite sex, and relationships in a whole new light. While the events in this play may not be something one would witness every day, it highlighted relationship issues we have all either witnessed or faced at some point.

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Privilege...and its many faces: My experience at WPC12

The White Privilege Conference is “designed to examine issues of privilege beyond skin color. WPC is open to everyone and invites diverse perspectives to provide a comprehensive look at issues of privilege including: race, gender, sexuality, class, disability, etc.—the ways we all experience some form of privilege, and how we’re all affected by that privilege.”

—www.whiteprivilegeconference.com

Dr. Eddie Moore, Jr. is the person attributed to organizing the White Privilege Conference from its inception. The conference today is a successful venture with the help of numerous allies dedicated to the cause of creating equitable environments and relationships amongst people. During the beginning of its creation, WPC was held at Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, IA and remained there for 6 years. At the time, Dr. Moore served as the Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Intercultural Life at Cornell College. Currently, he serves as Director of Diversity at The Bush School in Seattle, WA.

This year’s conference theme was This Land is Whose Land? focusing on immigration throughout history and its perceptions today. Immigration was discussed from the British colonizing the New World, to the mass genocide of Native Americans, the Atlantic slave trade, and current immigration laws as it pertains to international and domestic affairs. The approximately 30 person delegation from UNI, under the leadership of Diversity Fellows Dr. Victoria DeFrancisco and Dr. Laura Kaplan, ventured on this expedition to learn more about privilege, social justice, and racial equity. Other participants included professors Dr. Harry Brod, Dr. Jennifer Cooley, and Karen Mitchell; and Associate Provost for Academic Affairs Dr. Ginny Arthur.

Our UNI student attendants participated in a conference presentation under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Cooley called Crossing the Border/Cruzando la frontera. This presentation was a simulation session in which participants got to experience what it is like to cross the U.S./Mexico border and the hardships that people suffer in this difficult and life threatening process. The students were actors in the simulation and their characters ranged from other border crossers, police, and immigration officials. The participants who attended the simulation were incorporated into the scene.

The majority of the sessions I attended were interaction-based, allowing conference goers to discuss their opinions, observations, and experiences about privilege with each other. One of the most interesting sessions I went to was called Borderline. The presentation revolved around how a person can travel back and forth from the center (dominant culture) and the borderland (subordinate groups) according to what privileges that person possesses, whether the privilege is acknowledged or not. In the dominant center we find what society considers as “normal” (this includes: Caucasian, heterosexual, male, Christian, middle-class, able bodied, English speaking, thin, U.S. citizen). Everyone else is pushed out to the borderland.

Throughout the session we discussed how easy it is for some people to go into the center, but they remain invisible. This brought up the concept of “passing” in certain social circles. For example, one may be a light skinned biracial person, but can pass off as being “White”. Those individuals who are at the center and reach out to the borderland are perceived as trying to “find themselves” or to get rid of their guilt—but then can easily return to the center. We discussed that we have been socialized into categorizing people as the “exception” when they can move easily to and from groups, and without recognizing it we can abuse the little privileges we have.

Every night at the conference there were different diversity films, speakers, and caucus (one for People of Color and one for White Allies). I decided to attend the People of Color caucus one night, and to my surprise, I walked into an angry environment—people were mad at each other for not doing “the right thing”. An incident had occurred the night before in which a Caucasian person had attended...
the People of Color caucus and the facilitators did not ask the person to leave. Some felt threatened by this because this caucus is supposed to be a safe place for people of color to discuss their concerns and opinions without any judgment.

So what does a safe space feel and look like when your oppressor is present? As the incident kept unfolding, other participants stood up to express that we should not be fighting. This was the one place out of the entire conference in which we should come together as a community and support one another. This was to be a place for love and for healing.

It dawned on me that people of color could abuse the privileges they had, and oppress the people of their same group. I started to evaluate in what ways I use privilege. My educational achievements, income, and employment put me in a position of privilege. However, I learned that it is how you use the privilege and serve as a gatekeeper for others that demonstrates the fine line between abuse and access. Part of my job at the CME is to create safe environments and build inclusive communities for all UNI students. If I were to be selective on how I treat certain people, I wouldn’t be living out the purpose of my job, or my mission in life to make the world a better place.

As Nelson Mandela once said “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”. I encourage all to attend the White Privilege Conference in the future, because the more you learn about how people treat each other, the more you can do to ensure they treat each other with respect.

By: Tabatha Cruz

“What does a safe space feel and look like when your oppressor is present?”

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Growing up I witnessed different perspectives of the male role in relationships and observed both males and females staying in relationships, despite painful physical and/or mental abuse. I feel like this play created opportunities to spark much needed dialogue in a university setting as well with high school students who may be experiencing relationships for the first time.

Once the play concluded I was impressed with the perspectives shared by the Black Male Leaders Union during their “Barbershop” panel discussion. They were very articulate in sharing their views on relationships and past experiences. The comments by audience members balanced out the discussion and it was great to hear how the ladies felt on topics brought up. The discussion, as intended, ended up being a very similar experience to when I get my haircut at the barbershop. It was great to see a nice crowd show up and I would describe the event as a success and it was a great experience to be a part of this play.

Leaders of the Black Male Leaders Union pose for a picture before the start of the play.
By: Malcolm Jamal X

“The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness” written by Michelle Alexander has been used in book discussions in our community as a launching pad; sparking dialogue, change and addressing racism in the criminal justice system. Alexander is an associate of law professor at Ohio State University and a civil rights activist. She has served as the Director of the Racial Justice Project of the American Civil Liberties Union and served as a law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun.

*The New Jim Crow* compares the many similarities of the past Jim Crow laws from the late 1800’s to today’s legalized and systematic racial discrimination that takes place through incarceration. A book discussion of this topic naturally found a place here in Waterloo/Cedar Falls, as Iowa has one of the highest rates of incarceration of Blacks in the nation! Blacks imprisoned in Black Hawk County are a large contributor to this black eyed statistic. Both Waterloo and Cedar Falls Mayors were present during different discussions of the book as well as the Waterloo Police Chiefs, various city council members, and other community leaders. They, along with others, discussed local issues and statistics, like the fact that Black males are arrested at a rate 13 times higher than Whites in Black Hawk County.

Discussions were held at Jubilee United Methodist Church and at Cedar Falls Mennonite Church every other Tuesday for six sessions building up to Michelle Alexander’s lecture at the CME on Wednesday, March 30, 2011. By sitting in on the discussions and listening to the concerns of those in attendance was proof that mass incarceration is a social issue that our community and communities across the U.S. need to address. There were many different opinions shared at these study sessions from legalizing marijuana, leaving the justice system exactly how it is or suggesting a complete overhaul of the entire system. What I found exciting was that Michelle Alexander’s book created dialogue and we, as a community, were taking a step in the right direction to fix something that is (in my opinion), obviously not working.

In her book, Alexander provides statistics that show that race is still the key ingredient in determining who is targeted and fed into the penal system, despite living in a “colorblind” era. As our society and the media celebrates our first U.S. President of color, and the success of select minority in the public eye, the general population has been lax and are unconscious of the fact that there is a higher percentage of Black men are in prison today than in times of slavery. One out of every three Black men is under some type of control of the United States criminal justice system, and 75% of all drug arrests are Black or Latino individuals. These numbers remain consistent, even though statistics clearly show that the majority of illegal drug users and dealers nationwide are White. Furthermore, it has been statistically proven that the percentage of drug use between racial and ethnic groups’ is similar for Whites, Blacks, and Latinos.

So why is there is such a huge gap in who gets arrested, and who is getting funneled through the prison system?

There is no doubt, after examining the system, that race is still the main underlying factor. Because of the progress made in race relations, and retort that “everyone has a choice” and “no one forced those individuals in prison to be criminals”. However, until we realize that color is still an issue and that our justice system has more injustice breeding within it, there is no chance of correcting it.

Everyone in our society has been force fed an image on race and no one is immune to this image. One example that demonstrates the force-fed imagery was through an activity conducted in our book discussions for *The New Jim Crow*. Participants were asked to close their eyes and envision a drug user; describing the person they’ve constructed. Through survey results, 95% of individuals reported the drug-dealer to be Black, even though Blacks make up an average of 15% of all current drug users. This exercise demonstrates that all races have been brainwashed by stereotypes.

In Iowa alone, if whites were incarcerated at the same rates that Blacks were, there would be a need for six additional prisons to be built. Our discussion groups discussed
During the spring 2011 semester, I was provided the opportunity to fulfill a practicum assignment at the Center for Multicultural Education. The purpose of this assignment was to gain a better understanding of diversity and the CME was the department that could offer me this experience. I wanted to learn and understand about different cultures, personalities, views, and goals that other individuals had to offer. Many individuals believe being that diversified means just being surrounded by, living near, or working with people from other cultures. In my opinion, getting to know each other and embracing each other’s differences is what makes me a diversified individual. I got to work with many wonderful persons from different backgrounds. Through my experiences at the CME, I had the pleasure of working with individuals who have gone through struggles, grew up in other states, and are from different races and nationalities. These experiences allowed me to assimilate with students and learn about what they wanted in life, their education, and their characteristics. This is of great importance to me since I plan to work at a university after the completion of my Master’s Degree.

During my practicum experience, I had the great privilege of working side by side with Dr. Blackwell, Director of the CME, for the play entitled *Come Over Here*. The play was a representation of the struggles some college students experience in their interpersonal relationships. The play focused on abusive and sexual orientation matters. After reading the script, I jumped on the opportunity to be part of the play because I myself had experienced an abusive relationship. I knew I wanted be involved and spread the message that abuse is not acceptable, whether it be in the form of verbal or physical abuse. The play was a platform of information targeted toward individuals who may never have experienced or were even aware that this type of abuse exists and occurs regularly on college campuses. Another reason I was happy to contribute to the play, was because it shed light on the struggle it is to embrace one’s sexual orientation and be open with it. My children have aunts and uncles that are gay and lesbian and I wanted to be part of something that I knew was not only going to benefit the students, but myself as well. I can use the knowledge I gained through the play to educate my own children. I would recommend, for any individual who is struggling through an abusive relationship or their sexual identity, to talk to someone they can trust because they are not alone.

“I wanted to be part of something that I knew was not only going to benefit the students, but myself as well.”

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taxes to fund all the Whites in prisons as well? Would we still force all felons to take second-class citizenship once they were released from prison? I personally feel that if all races were incarcerated at the same rate, we would not tolerate that treatment to society as a whole, and reform would be an automatic guarantee for our justice system. However, since mass incarceration only seems to be affecting and destroying individuals of color, particularly Black men, this issue continues to be swept under the rug and allowed to perpetually exist.

Michelle Alexander concludes her book with a passage from the *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin which says “[Our country, our society]...Has destroyed and are destroying hundreds of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it.....It is their innocence which constitutes the crime.”

As a society, we have a responsibility to change a systematic error that continues to repeat itself and continues to cost our communities countless lives, time, and financial resources. The first step is to be aware that we have the means and power to change it. This is not an untreatable cancer that has to continue to mutilate a targeted group of people. Thanks to a brave woman like Michelle Alexander we can acknowledge that this subject needs to be addressed and use our minds to come up with an alternative to incarcerating a mass group of individuals based on color.
I had the opportunity to hear Dr. Joann Lee lecture Asian American cultures on March 28, 2011, at the CME. Dr. Lee spoke about the obstacles Asian Americans have encountered while being portrayed in the media and working in show business. Dr. Lee mentioned how the stereotypes about Asian Americans are not in any way negative; they nevertheless affect how they are delineated by others in school and in the workplace. I realized Asian Americans have experienced some of the issues Hispanics have also encountered. Lee’s research informed the audience that Asian Americans are categorized into stereotypes: hardworking, “super students”, well-educated professionals, strong family unity, and yet limited in cultural exposure. Albeit, these statements are not negative in any way, these stereotypes are still damaging to individuals who do not fall into that sphere.

In college, Asian Americans are sought out by other students who think Asians are great at math—playing into the “super student” stereotype. I can empathize with their frustration, because I am sought out by individuals who automatically think I can speak Spanish because I am Mexican. Attending lectures like Dr. Lee’s is important because it provides individuals with the reality of what it is like to be treated a certain way because of stereotypes. The gist of her lecture was to make the audience aware that we need to appreciate all cultures to better understand and relate to each other. In addition to hearing her speak, I had the privilege of accompanying Dr. Lee to dinner that evening. I got to see a different side of her and it was interesting to get to know her on a personal level. Dr. Joann Lee is a very strong and opinionated woman. She spoke about her struggle through cancer, how she survived it, and how she remains healthy. During dinner I realized that despite the fact that she is Asian, she did not fall into the stereotypes of someone being good in math or science, because nevertheless, she achieved greatness in the Communications field. Lee has written books and lectured on Asian American culture, making her a role model that young Asian Americans can look up to. Women and Asian American role models like Lee, are paving the way for individuals who feel they need to play into their stereotypes. This is all the more reason to become educated on topics out of one’s comfort level.