

**BOLD MOVES #NSAC2020**  
**Nothing for Us Without Us: Troubling Affinity  
Spaces In Times of Catastrophe**

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**Presenters:**

**Farah Tanis,**  
**Executive Director**  
**Sevonna Brown**  
**Associate Executive Director**

**Black Women's Blueprint**  
279 Empire Blvd.  
Brooklyn, NY.11225

[WWW.BLACKWOMENSBLUEPRINTNY.ORG](http://WWW.BLACKWOMENSBLUEPRINTNY.ORG)



**BLACKWOMEN'S  
BLUEPRINT**

# About Black Women's Blueprint (BWB)

Black Women's Blueprint is a Black feminist organization using civil and human rights approaches to organize and develop a culture where women, girls, gender nonconforming and gender fluid people are fully empowered and where disparities are erased.



# Our Vision

To create a world where individuals, communities and all beings are restored to their most balanced, whole and full selves, moving the world from one of mourning to joy, one where all lives, bodies, lands are honored, and communities find a home for their various spiritualities and prayers, meditations and practices for peace.



# Our Work Across Stands on Two Pillars

**Restorative Justice and Reproductive Justice**



# Collective Practice: Shared Agreements and Principles BY N'TANYA LEE

- We are living beings, creating living work: the invitation is to bring solutions and suggestions
- Assume good intent, attend to impact
- Engage tension, don't indulge drama
- We are creating a new world while immersed in this realm of intersecting oppressions



# Collective Practice: Shared Agreements and Principles BY N'TANYA LEE

- We struggle for the sake of deepening unity and collective understanding.
- Confidentiality - preserve sacred space, cite this work



# Collective Practice: Shared Agreements and Principles BY N'TANYA LEE

- Don't relegate issues that are hard to confront to “culturally specific” or DEI i.e. issues to a culturally specific because of it's challenging content



# Grounding in community and connecting to self

Join us in becoming present to  
why we do this work

“I am because you are...”



# Learning Objectives

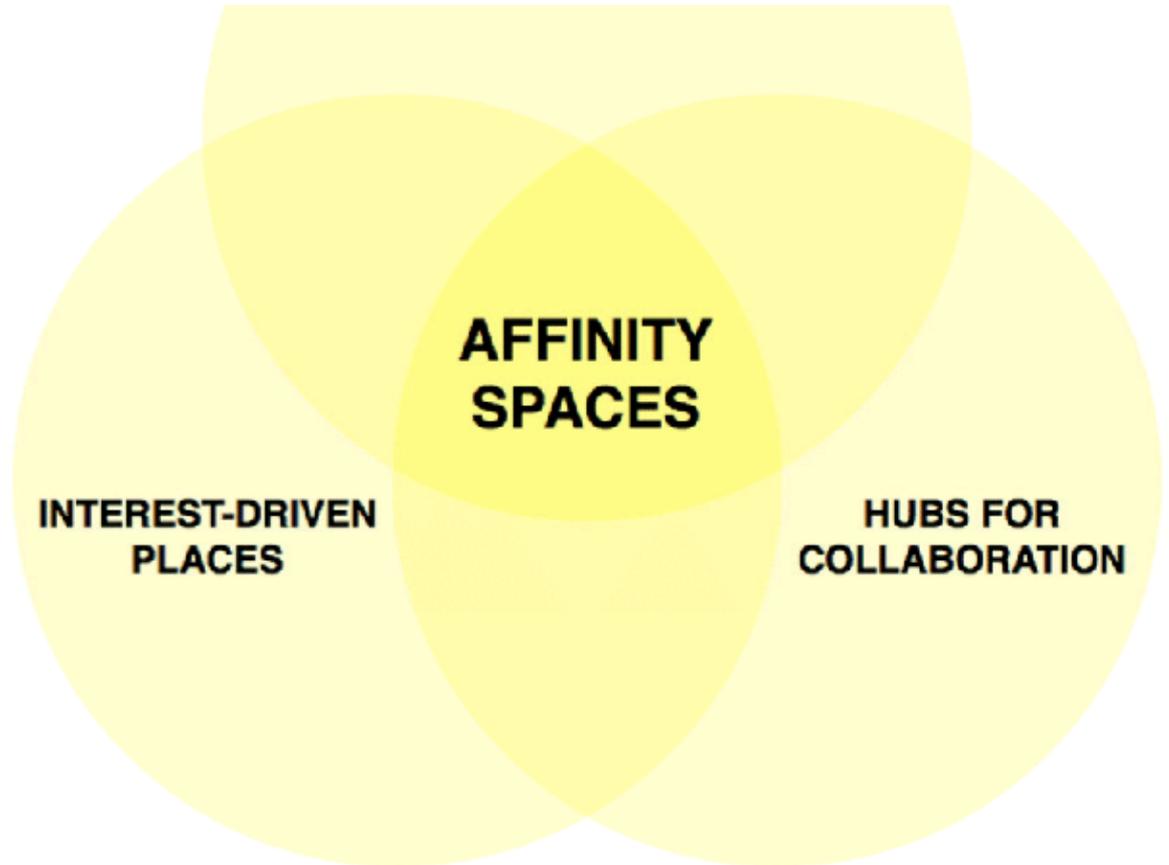
- The workshop will detail how a commitment to co-creating vibrant communities while surfacing indigenous understandings of human connection can save us all.
- The workshop will increase participants' knowledge of practical frameworks like authentic relating, beloved community, developmental change, communities of change process, integral development, feminist transformation, and racial healing.

# What is an Affinity Space to You?

A Reflective Process

# A Definition of Affinity Spaces

A group of people who are brought together by a common interest. A social group formed by an appreciation or love of something, where relationships can develop between the active people in a group. (Male only groups or white only groups)



# Why Do Affinity Spaces Work?

- They provide a sense of community
- They bring people together in safer environments
- They allow for better socializing among those who may not feel comfortable in face-to-face interaction with “others”
- They promote creativity and thought process
- They promote vulnerability and compassion
- They promote a level of comfort
- They promote honesty
- They promote empathy and acceptance

# If the Above is True, Do Non-Affinity or Disegregated Spaces do the Following?

- They **don't** provide a sense of community
- They **don't** bring people together in safer environments
- They **don't** allow for better socializing among those who may not in feel comfortable in face-to-face interaction
- They **don't** promote creativity and thought process
- They **don't** promote vulnerability and compassion
- They **don't** promote a level of comfort
- They **don't** promote honesty
- They **don't** promote empathy and acceptance

## **At what point do affinity spaces become problematic?**

1. When the affinity space becomes safe space for participants to remain in perpetual reflection on their privilege, with no action.
2. Maintains a sense of superiority among those in the affinity group who begin to see themselves as so privileged that they pity others, placing themselves on a pedestal with self-grandiosity.

# Debunking Dominant Notions of Privilege and Power in Affinity Spaces



# Unpack Internalized Superiority

## **Internalized Racial, Gender, Class and Other Superiority**

The acceptance of and acting out of a superior definition is rooted in the historical designation of one's race gender or other identity. Over many generations, this process of empowerment and access expresses itself as unearned privileges, access to institutional power and invisible advantages based upon race.

# Common vs. Counter Definitions of Privilege

- **Common Definition:** A right or immunity granted systemically or to personal benefit, advantage, or favor. Privilege grants a set of benefits and system rewards to one group while simultaneously excluding other groups from accessing these advantages.
- **Counter Definition:** Our definition of privilege goes beyond material goods and possessions or value granted. It goes beyond what the system can reward and offer. We see privilege as those sets of attributes, knowledge and wisdom that is the domain of all human beings. It is the capacity to recognize and access non-material wealth as a different kind of inheritance.

# Privilege, Power and Paradigm Shift

1. Our regard and our narratives about privilege and power require a paradigm shift.
2. The story above underscores that for us, walking into a room, not just as one, but as many (even thousands - with the Spirits of our ancestor, freedom fighters, justice seekers, culture keepers and armies of spiritualists,) IS privilege and IS power.

# Privilege, Power and Paradigm Shift



## **At what point do affinity spaces become problematic?**

3. The affinity space maintains an entitlement to secrecy, away from the eye and listening ear of the oppressed.
4. Maintains complacency and stagnancy, a sense that you are not a “bad” person and it is not your fault; avoids guilt or perpetuates performative guilt.

## **At what point do affinity spaces become problematic?**

5. Affinity spaces begin to falter when they no longer center those most impacted by oppression and violence.
6. When white fragility and male fragility (fragile masculinity) is maintained.

## At what point do affinity spaces become problematic?

7. Allows habits of white supremacy or male supremacy to flourish: i.e. Moving at white pace or male pace (not moving at a pace that the oppressed needs to heal, but instead allows you to move at a space logical to you.)

8. It stifles productive discomfort: which simply means stifling the possibility of stepping outside of your comfort zone, outside of your skin, outside of your safe affinity space in order to meet with the “other”, *those constantly harmed*, thereby spurring growth and a kind of evolution.

# Nothing For Us Without Us



**We are not encouraging the movement to burden women in the fight to end violence against women, nor Black people in the fight towards racial justice.**

# **A History Lesson: Well intentioned Affinity Groups Can Begin to Coalesce Around an Agenda That Further Perpetuates Harm.**

- White-led anti-racism groups have existed for hundreds of years, and they've often been problematic, counterproductive.
- The Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society of 1833, which believed that slave owners were missing out on a business opportunity by not putting slaves on the payroll.

# Nothing For Us Without Us: Where Does it Come From?

1. A Disability Justice Call to Action: Disability rights activist James Charlton traced the origin of “Nothing about us without us” to South African disability rights advocates in the 1980’s.
2. Before that, it was used as a rallying cry among Eastern European labor organizers and in the very distant past, came from a sixteenth century law limiting the power of a king. In the present day, “Nothing about us without us” has been adopted by others fighting for self-empowerment and self-determination.

# Nothing for Us Without Us: Men Stopping Violence Against Women Without Us in the Room

- Engaging boys and men as anti-violence allies is an increasingly core element of efforts to prevent and end violence against women.
- Engaging men as partners in efforts to end violence against women can be seen as parallel to white “ally” development in other social justice arenas.
- Do we have existing multi-gender frameworks to succeed in violence prevention?
- How do we eliminate essentialism in our movements?
- Eliminating tokenizing in movement work
- Disrupting another kind of locker room talk

# Engaging Men: Radicalizing Prevention Means Troubling Men Only Affinity Spaces

Challenge the idea that it is only men who can teach other men to end violence or only white people can teach other white people to end racism.



# Engaging Men and Boys

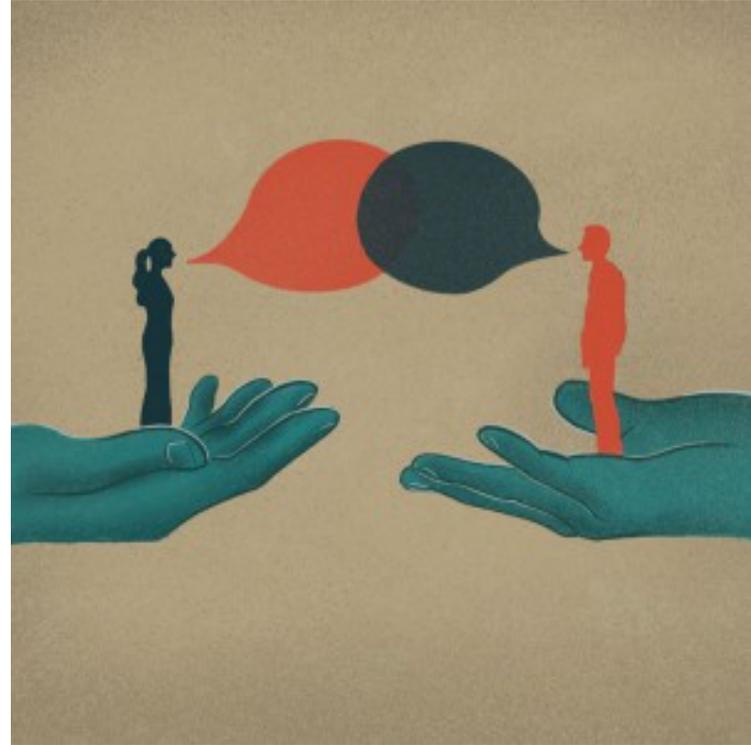
- “The [engaging men] community has at times leapfrogged over well-established women’s rights organisations and activists—undermining the leadership of these groups instead of supporting them, and not always listening to concerns regarding [engaging men] programming.” -Jeanne Ward, Coalition of Feminist for Social Change.

## **Successful examples: Mmatshilo Motsei in South Africa**

Mmatshilo Motsei's work to end violence against women has a focus on repair and reconciliation, she works with men who have harmed and cultivates a violence intervention model that center healing and spirituality.

# Self + Community Evaluation

The practice of men engaging men has failed, and the practice of whites engaging whites has failed.



# The Current Moment

- The recent uprisings against white supremacy and the inequities exposed by the COVID pandemic have underscored the need for not just bold moves but radical moves.
- Bold and radical prevention strategies
  - Bold and radical action
  - Bold and radical services
  - Bold and radical policy and practice models that interrupt cycles of deprivations of humanity through sustainable micro, meso and macro level change.
  - Bold and radical movement and reconciliation spaces
  - Bold and radical ways of being

# What Times of Catastrophe Have Taught Us as BIPOC: Doris' Story



# The Current Moment and the Invitation to Embody Beloved Community

Bold and radical prevention strategies

- Resist silos
- resist isolationist tendencies
- reject divide and conquer tactics
- Bold and radical services - In this moment of realization once again that *“WE are all we’ve got”*
- Bold and radical movement and reconciliation spaces
- Bold and radical ways of being

# Guiding Question

How can we build an interconnected and vibrant community which provides the conditions for those who have caused harm to heal, thrive, and practice interconnection?

# Necessary and Radical/Unlearning

1. Open up: Feel our feelings
2. Wonder: Find something we can learn from the feedback
3. Center: Re-connect to our core values
4. Discern: Figure out what you personally are going to do now
5. Respond: Action, gratitude, and helping others

# Self + Community Evaluation

- How do you engage with people who are different than you? What practices could you add?
- How do you engage in racial healing and gender justice work across genders?
- What roles can you use to dismantle oppressive systems in your family, work and communities, and depending on your identities, what are the costs or barriers?
- Lastly, what movements are you part of or do you support? (If you feel disconnected, how can you plug in? If you want to deepen your participation, what's the next step?)

# A Reconciliation Center is Needed



# Cultivating Internal Transformation

- Continuous growth
- Endless growth
- Try again, fail again, fail better - Cornel West
- Continually in process
- Interrogating assumptions

# Alliances

# Identifying the root or core that is thwarting action



# Can we transform and change our minds, hearts and spirits?

1. Changing ingrained and conditioned behaviors to benefit ourselves and our movements
2. A different approach to change
3. For reactions to occur, molecules must break the bonds between their atoms and form new ones
4. Being and becoming a catalyst
5. Identify what is preventing change and remove that barrier

# Reconciliation and Accountability

**“Truth means the condition of suffering must speak. Keep track of any form of harm, of unwarranted hurt.” - Cornel West**



# **Fashioning Interventions that Transform Allyship in Service of Justice, Ending Violence and Exploitation and Supporting Psychological, Communal Well Being**

- “Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex.
- This provocation is intended to intervene in some of the current tensions around solidarity/support work as the current trajectories are counter-liberatory.
- Ally has also become an identity, disembodied from any real mutual understanding of support.
- The term ally has been rendered ineffective and meaningless.

**What does it mean to solve the problem  
together?**

# How having the capacity and the will to change is bold move:

- At some point there is a “we”, and we most likely will have to work together. This means, at the least, formulating mutual understandings that are not entirely antagonistic, otherwise we may find ourselves, our desires, and our struggles, to be incompatible.
- There are certain understandings that may not be negotiable. There are contradictions that we must come to terms with and certainly we will do this on our own terms.

**A Call to Action: New praxis and evolved pedagogies of prevention at the intersection of radical models of restorative justice, truth and reconciliation.**



# Our Work Defined: Values and Principles

1. **Transformation:** *As we seek to radically transform communities and societies, we are equally committed to our own transformation and healing.*
2. **Partnership:** *We believe that the best solutions come through our shared integrity, knowledge and work. We partner with community members and content experts to accelerate change.*
3. **Innovation & Creativity:** *We strive to innovate and bring new ways of thinking and practice to address the intractable and interconnected issues of institutional violence.*
4. **Lived Experiences:** *We value our lived experiences as individuals, in our families and culture because each life is filled with dignity and enriches our community.*
5. **Knowledge Creation:** *We believe that knowledge creation is the intervention that can inform new strategies and approaches to addressing institutional violence and transform individuals and communities.*
6. **Community:** *We strive to model a transformative community of colleagues and stakeholders through inclusivity, mutual respect, integrity, and valuing the unique contributions that each of us brings.*

**What is liberation? What would your grandchildren or great-grandchildren say that freedom is?**

