

Pre Attendance Resources Advancing Racial Justice through UniServ Work 2024



Pre Attendance Package

UniServ Directors work with members, supporters and partners in many settings and must be highly skilled in leading, coaching and organizing across racial differences. NEA Center for Organizing and Affiliate Support in partnership with the NEA Center for Social Justice created a training designed to build participants' understanding of individualized and structuralized racism and provide examples of union-led racial justice interventions. Participants will learn how to deepen racial discourse skills in themselves and others, how to navigate issues of race that surface in their work, and how to access valuable resources for advancing racial justice.

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Why pre-attendance work?

In the short time we are together, we will begin the tough and important work of understanding implicit bias, interpersonal racism, structural racism, and institutional racism. This work depends on participants' willingness to be both reflective and vulnerable enough to learn. Our ability to create a safe enough, or courageous space for adult learning to take place depends on your preparedness for this work. To support this, we have put together some important and thought-provoking readings and activities. We believe that this pre-work will help you transition away from the day to day responsibilities of UniServ Director work and move into the role of adult learner.

What are you asking me to do?

In this package you will find several articles that we will use in our training. Based on past-participant feedback, we are providing these in advance so that you can be prepared for our conversations. You will find the Community Agreements on pages 11-12 outlined for this meeting, please review them and consider the questions found on page 12 as this will be one of the first things we do together. There is a story found on page 13 about an ESP named Angel that we will be discussing as well. You will find several case studies beginning on page 100. We will be using these as parts of significant group learnings, please be familiar with them, it will be noticeable for you and your team if you have not yet taken a look at them. This should take no more than 45 minutes total before you arrive.

4 Pre Attendance Getting Started Tasks on Pages 3-10 (approximate time to complete 90 minutes)

These are specific tasks that we will be using in group work during our time together. There will not be time during the meeting to complete these, and completing these all at once might be emotionally exhausting. We have provided them in advance to allow you choice in how, when, and where you first engage with them. Appropriate questions to consider as you review resources and complete the tasks:

- How does this intersect with my daily work as a UniServ Director?
- As a UniServ Director what is my role in improving this (issue, condition, problem)?
- What would I need to know to help others who want to make a change in this (issue, condition, problem)?

There are additional resources compiled in this guide for your own self-education that begin on page . If you have NOT attended any other Racial Justice trainings, it is highly recommended that you read these prior to attending. This is not required, but is suggested. The titles of these are:

- Don't Talk about Implicit Bias Without Discussing Structural Racism
- Understanding Bias
- The Science of Equality (defines Racial Anxiety)
- America's War on Black Trans Women
- HRC Honors Black Trans Person
- Being Black in a White Workplace
- Historical Trauma and Impact on Health and Well-being
- What is White Privilege, Really?
- How to be an Ally
- Dr. Seuss's Racist Past Isn't Your Problem
- Structuralized Racism
- Why Labor and the Movement for Racial Justice Should Work Together
- How Can Unions Fight for Racial Justice
- Scaffolded Resources for White Ally Groups

Task 1: Implicit Association Test (Estimated Completion Time 30 Minutes) We will be exploring what implicit bias is and how this intersects with attitudes and actions. The first step in becoming astute at racial discourse is to explore and reflect on your own possible implicit biases. This activity is designed to help you with that. It is highly recommended that prior to taking the Implicit Association test, that you visit:

<https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/test-yourself-for-hidden-bias>
for a brief but thorough description of why we ask you to do this.

Directions for Accessing the: Implicit Association Test

Go to the following site:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/> Take “Project
Implicit Social Attitudes”

Choose “continue
as guest” Select
“Go”

Select “I wish to proceed” all the way to the bottom

Select “Race IAT” from the

list of tests THEN REPEAT BUT

SELECT "Sexuality IAT"

Reflect on findings and be prepared to share your thoughts, questions and/or concerns during the training. You will not be asked to disclose your findings – but will be expected to participate in the reflection on what it means to learn about your biases. Many folks have gone back and done other of the association tests, you should feel free to explore as many as you would like. This would be a one page reflection.

Reflect on findings and be prepared to share your thoughts, questions and/or concerns during the training. You will not be asked to disclose your findings – but will be expected to participate in the reflection on what it means to learn about your biases.

Task 2: Self-Assessment (Estimated Completion Time 15 Minutes) You are going to choose between two self-assessments found the next four pages. Select the one that fits you best. Follow the directions found on each one and read the page at the end of the self-assessment you selected.

For your reflection:

1. At what age did you first realize what your race was?
2. What do you remember from your childhood about how you made sense of human differences? If you have kids, is it different for them today than your own experience?
3. How have external factors influenced your thinking about racial difference? Good or bad? People, things, media, etc.?

Once you have completed this task, you might want to read the resource titled The Science of Equality.

Person of Color Racial Anxiety Self-Test

Ask yourself the following:

1. Do I feel nervous when a white person says “you people?”
2. Do I feel angry when white people tell me that I was only hired because of my color ?
3. When a white person wants to talk to me about race, do I feel nervous because I think they will become offended by my answers?
4. Do I feel angry or annoyed by the above questions?
5. Do I have a history of not speaking out on racism that I see and feel ashamed of that?
6. Does saying “Not all those people” or similar phrases make me feel better when someone calls people of color out for something?
7. Do I assume that I won’t get an apology when I feel like I’ve been unfairly accused of being angry about something that is racist?
8. Do I feel better when I hear white people say, “I know what it is like to be your people because I am (married to, parent, dated, friends with) a person of color?”
9. Do I feel annoyed or angry when white people talk about how hard their ancestors had it when they immigrated, or explain their own hardships when a person of color talks about being oppressed?
10. Do I think that racism would go away if people stopped talking about it?
11. Does being told that something I say, think, do, or otherwise value is not as important make me want to shut down, leave, or express my discomfort/displeasure in some way?
12. Do I feel annoyed or angry when white people need to state that they have friends/family who are people of color when someone accuses them of racism?
13. Do I feel the need to prove that I’m as good as my white colleagues?
14. Do I feel that my opinions and perspectives about race will be discounted by white people, that they will not believe I have something unique and important to contribute to the race conversation, and/or that I will not be fully listened to when I speak?
15. Do I feel the need to defend myself on any of the above points in the comment section?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are dealing with Racial Anxiety. Take time to reflect on why you feel the way that you do. Take time to listen to different perspectives.

Racial anxiety can be acute, experienced as physiological threat (and cognitive depletion in anticipation of and following an interracial interaction. When people experience the physical symptoms of anxiety during a cross-racial interaction, they often distance themselves, are less apt to share eye contact, and use a less friendly and engaging verbal tone – behaviors which can obviously undermine an interaction (Dovidio et al., 2002).

At its worst, racial anxiety can cause an emotionally unhealthy situation for people of color because of racial power dynamics and the weight of being responsible for white folks’ feelings while not having

space to express their own. There is also the weight that comes with people that you care about lashing out at and abusing you (verbally, emotionally, and/or digitally).

When we experience racial anxiety, we may not recognize it – and we are even less likely to recognize that the person with whom we are interacting may be experiencing it as well. Thus, as a result of “pluralistic ignorance,” whites and people of color are apt to behave in ways that confirm the other’s fears – failing to initiate contact through open body language, eye contact, and other non-verbal signals of welcoming interaction (Shelton & Richeson, 2005). The absence of this kind of body language makes both people appear unfriendly or unwelcoming. In sum, racial anxiety begets more racial anxiety.

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White Person Racial Anxiety Self-Test

Ask yourself the following:

1. Do I feel defensive when a person of color says “white people?”
2. Do I feel unsettled when people tell me that I benefit from white privilege?
3. When a person of color talks about race, do I feel defensive because they’re describing things that I do or think as racist?
4. Do I feel angry or annoyed by the above questions?
5. Do I have a history of embracing or growing up in racism that I feel ashamed of and so I need to show people that I’m not racist anymore?
6. Does saying “Not all white people” or similar phrases make me feel better when someone calls white people out for something?
7. Do I expect an apology when I feel like I’ve been unfairly accused of racism?
8. Do I feel better when I say, hear, or read, “It’s okay to be white?”
9. Do I try to convince people of color that they’re wrong about racism by pointing out people from their racial group who agree with me?
10. Do I feel the need to talk about how hard my ancestors had it when they immigrated, or explain my own hardships when a person of color talks about being oppressed?
11. Do I think that racism would go away if people stopped talking about it?
12. Does being told that something I say, think, do, or otherwise value is racist make me want to shut down, leave, or express my discomfort/displeasure in some way?
13. Do I feel the need to state that I have friends/family who are people of color when someone accuses me of racism?
14. Do I feel the need to prove that I’m not racist?
15. Do I feel that my opinions and perspectives about race should be given equal weight to that of a person of color, that I have something unique and important to contribute to the race conversation, and/or that it is unfair to be told to listen more than I speak?
16. Do I feel the need to defend myself on any of the above points in the comment section?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are dealing with white fragility. Take time to reflect on why you feel the way that you do. Take time to listen to different perspectives.

If you are white, then your experience with Racial Anxiety has been named White fragility (Robin DiAngelo). This anxiety is a hindrance to racial healing because it prevents white people from being able to engage with non-white people in honest conversation as they may feel that they are expected to bear the burden of catering to white people’s emotional comfort.

At its worst, white fragility can cause an emotionally unhealthy situation for people of color because of racial power dynamics and the weight of being responsible for white folks' feelings while not having space to express our own. There is also the weight that comes with people that you care about lashing out at and abusing you (verbally, emotionally, and/or digitally).

If we cannot talk honestly about the issues, then we cannot make progress.

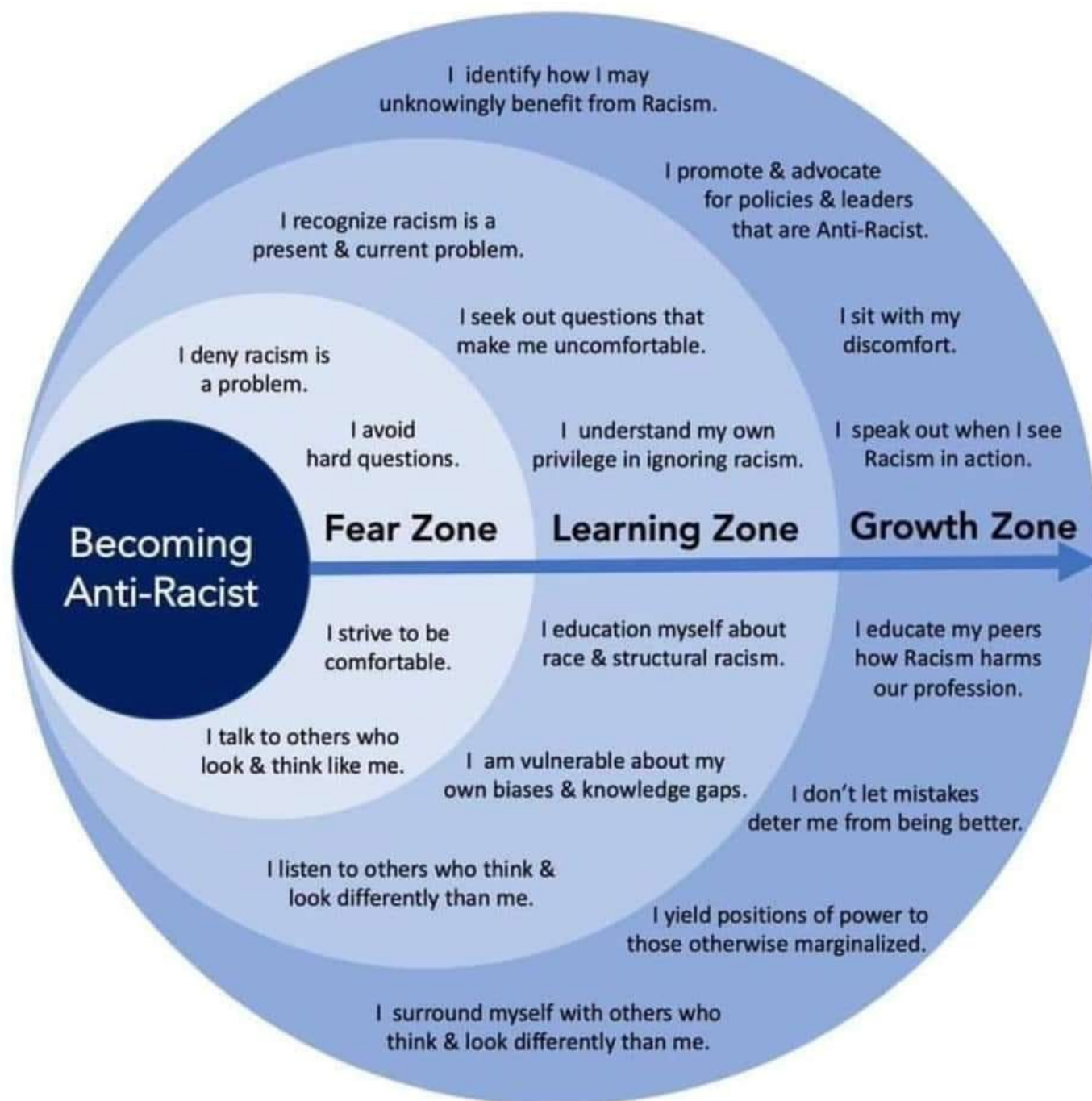
*White Fragility, as defined by DiAngelo, is the result of white racial socialization. A state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial comfort and status quo.

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Task 3: Where am I currently in learning to become anti-racist? (Estimated Completion Time 15 Minutes) Using the graphic below, circle any of the descriptors that you feel match how you think and act as it relates to your learning about anti-racism. The goal is for you to become aware of where you are in your “journey” so that you can more finely tune what you need to continue to grow.

Once you have circled the descriptors that best match your actions and thoughts, notice which of the three zones you are primarily operating in.

Reflection Question: How does this help you think about what your next steps might need to be?



Task 4: Understanding Privilege (Expected Completion Time 15 Minutes)

On your own, read through the following privilege statements. If you identify with one of the privileges listed, make a check mark.

	1. The leader of my country is also a person of my racial group. (RACE)
	2. When going shopping, I can easily find clothes that fit my size and shape. (SIZE)
	3. In public, I can kiss and hold hands with the person I am dating without fear of name-calling or violence. (SEXUALITY)
	4. When I go shopping, I can be fairly certain that sales or security people will not follow me. (RACE/APPEARANCE)
	5. Most of the religious and cultural holidays celebrated by my family are recognized with days off from work or school. (RELIGION/CULTURE)
	6. When someone is trying to describe me, they do not mention my race. (RACE)
	7. When I am angry or emotional, people do not dismiss my opinions as symptoms of “that time of the month.” (GENDER)
	8. When expressing my opinion, I am not automatically assumed to be a spokesperson of my race. (RACE)
	9. I can easily buy greeting cards that represent my relationship with my significant others. (SEXUALITY)
	10. I can easily find hair products and people who know how to style my hair. (RACE)
	11. In my family, it is seen as normal to obtain a college degree. (CLASS)
	12. If I am going out to dinner with friends, I do not worry if the building will be accessible to me. (ABILITY)
	13. I can be certain that when I attend an event there will be people of my race there. (RACE)
	14. People do not make assumptions about my work ethic or intelligence based on the size of my body. (SIZE)
	15. When I strongly state my opinion, people see it as assertive rather than aggressive. (RACE/GENDER)
	16. When I am with others of my race, people do not think that we are segregating ourselves. (RACE)
	17. I can feel comfortable speaking about my culture without feeling that I’ll be judged. (RACE/ETHNICITY)
	18. I can usually afford (without much hardship) to do the things that my friends want to do for entertainment. (CLASS)
	19. When filling out forms for school or work, I easily identify with the box that I have to check. (GENDER/RACE)
	20. I can choose the style of dress that I feel comfortable in and most reflects my identity, and I know that I will not be stared at in public. (GENDER/APPEARANCE)
	21. If pulled over by a police officer, I can be sure that I have not been singled out because of my race. (RACE)
	22. My professionalism is never questioned because of my age. (AGE)
	23. I do not worry about walking alone at night. (GENDER/RACE)
	24. People do not make assumptions about my intelligence based upon my style of speech. (RACE)
	25. When attending class or other events, I do not have to worry about having an interpreter present to understand or to participate. (ABILITY/LANGUAGE)
	26. I can book an airline flight, go to a movie, or ride in a car and not worry about whether there will be a seat that can accommodate me. (SIZE/ABILITY)
	27. People assume I was admitted to school or hired based upon my credentials, rather than my race or gender. (RACE/GENDER)
	28. As a child, I could use the “flesh-colored” crayons to color my family and have it match our skin (RACE)

Community Agreements for Our Time

Awareness and Self-Knowledge

This requires self-knowledge and self-awareness. Self-knowledge allows you to see what causes you pain and conflict and enables you to embrace your contradictions and inconsistencies. It allows the space to work on things about yourself that you are not happy with. In turn, self-knowledge helps to prevent you from projecting your negative aspects onto other people. Bringing your best self also requires that you have a learning attitude, are willing to deeply explore your perspectives, and remain open to the perspectives and experiences of others.

Listening for Understanding

Be an active listener. Active listening involves paying full and careful attention to the other person, avoiding interruptions, reflecting your understanding, clarifying information, summarizing the other person's perspectives and sharing your own. Remember that most people need time to open up and might not be willing to immediately share their personal stories, hopes, fears and/or concerns.

Being Gracious

Being kind is a vital way of bringing meaning to our own lives, as well as the lives of others. Kindness is about caring genuinely for others around you, wanting the best for them and recognizing in them the same wants, needs, aspirations and even fears that you may have. Being kind and generous allows us to communicate better with others, to be more self-compassionate and to be a positive force in other people's lives. We are gracious when we accept and genuinely work to use the pronouns that others ask us to use. Being gracious does not mean that you are blind to your personal pain. Extending grace, kindness, and care comes with boundaries for your safety. Being gracious includes following the COVID protocols that are in place to protect the health of this learning community.

Staying Engaged

Staying engaged requires you to be morally, emotionally, intellectually and socially involved in the conversation. Staying engaged means that you are listening with curiosity and willing to deepen your understanding. Staying engaged might also require you to sustain the conversation even when it gets uncomfortable or diverted. This means a commitment to keeping your electronic communications to a minimum with folks not present in this learning community. This also means being present for all portions of the learning agenda. It also means creating healing space for yourself as needed so that you can reengage when you are ready.

Being Open and Suspending Judgment

Listening with an open mind includes being receptive to the influence of others. You can suspend judgment by becoming aware of preconceived notions and listening to everything someone has to say before jumping to conclusions. Most importantly, suspending judgment also means listening to what the speaker has to say for understanding, not just to determine whether the speaker is right or wrong. This means that we recognize each of us will make mistakes and that we have the capacity to grow. We should expect imperfections. Suspending judgement does not mean acceptance.

Saying "I"- tell your truth

Speaking your truth in authentic and courageous conversations about race and other issues where experiences/perspectives may differ widely from yours requires a willingness to take risks. It means that you will be absolutely honest and candid about your own thoughts, feelings, experiences and opinions and not just saying what you perceive others want to hear. Speaking your truth will require you to speak from the "first person" and use "I" statements. Only you are fully aware of the level of truth you feel safe enough to share and that is enough.

Seeking Discomfort

Leaning in to discomfort will require you to let go of understandings and stereotypes that you may be holding onto in order to move forward. Leaning in means that you will avoid pre-judgment and be open to the kernel of wisdom in each individual's experiences. Leaning in to discomfort will require you to sit through moments of embarrassment, confusion, anxiety, and/or fear. You are in control of how far you lean in.

Reaching Empathy

Empathy and compassion allow you to understand the other person's point of view. When you are empathetic, you are more understanding, patient and kind. Expanding your capacity to feel empathy will also allow others to enter your circle of human concern. Sharing, using, and respecting pronouns is a very simple form of empathy. Understanding is not equal to agreement.

Expecting Non-Resolution and Non-Closure

Expect and accept that there may not be closure. It is not likely that you will resolve your personal understanding about race or another person's racial experience in a single conversation. The more you talk about race or other issues with another person, the more you learn and the more they will learn. Authentic and productive conversations about race and other issues where experiences/perspectives may differ widely from yours are continuous and always evolving. This means that sometimes we will have unfinished, unexplored, and shortened conversations about some concepts.

**Adapted from "Embracing equity and inclusion", Annie E. Casey Foundation*

What questions do you want to ask about any of the ideas in these agreements?

What additional agreements do you need in order to be a fully participating member of our learning community?

Can you commit to these agreements? IF not, what would it take for you to be able to commit?

Everyday Racism in Union Work

We will be working on this scenario in a breakout session with others. Prior to our meeting, it would be helpful for you to familiarize yourself with the story.

Angel is a newly hired Educational Support Professional (ESP) at Rolling Seas Elementary School – a school that they attended as a child. They are an instructional aide in the special education resource room. This school is known for high poverty, large class sizes, and a high number of English language learners. Angel was the first person in their family to get a degree from the community college. Several generations of Angel's family are all from this community. Angel wanted to continue on at state college to become a certified teacher of students with special needs, but the cost of school was too much. They are a parent who works a second job to earn enough money to eventually move out of their mother's apartment. They are grateful for their family's overall support but wants their own place. Compounding the household budget issues, Angel's child fell off their trike a few years ago resulting in huge, uninsured medical bills. Despite working to pay them off, several are in collection, which is affecting Angel's applications for rental agreements.

Upon meeting the Lead Teacher, Phyllis, Angel is immediately complimented on how well they speak and their lovely, long hair. Phyllis makes sure to discuss how supportive they are of undocumented families and how Angel should feel comfortable in this room with them. As Angel helps Phyllis set up the room for the first day of school, they notice that for any child who has a "different" sounding name, Phyllis puts a bright yellow name sign on the child's desk. Curious, Angel asks about this. Phyllis lets Angel know that these students probably don't speak English and will always come to class without lunch money. All the teachers in the special education program use this as a signal for the lunch accountability tally. "It is just easier that way," says Phyllis.

Later in the day, the conversation turns to getting to know one another and Phyllis asks Angel, "What made you want to be an instructional aide?" Angel shares their story and their aspirations to get a teaching certificate. Phyllis does not have the heart to tell Angel that this dream will likely never come true. There are no reimbursements for professional development for ESP members in the district, and most of the courses required for the full certification program are at the state college in the evening. Phyllis just knows that people like Angel would never be able to overcome the issues of child-care, transportation and added debt, so they don't mention it. "It wouldn't be nice to get their hopes up," thinks Phyllis.

Angel is approached by Carol, the Union's Building Representative (a classroom teacher), and Carol asks them to join the local union. Angel asked about the cost, and Carol responded by saying, "Support staff don't pay much considering all that we have to do for you people. We used to be separate organizations. Now, I think we're more focused on professional issues instead of what matters. The dues are described in this flyer." Carol left a folder of information and a business card of a man that she said worked for the Union. He would help Angel when they got into trouble. Angel asked, "Are there any programs for getting a teaching certification?" "I'll check," says Carol. Angel took the information, but no one ever came to talk to them from the union again. They would have loved to know how to get professional development. Angel called the union office once, and when they asked for information was immediately told they had to be a member first and that they needed to contact the building rep or UniServ Director. "All I wanted was information," they thought, "and all I got was sent back to the people that did not contact me. I guess they really don't want people like me."

As the year went on, and Angel got to know more classroom teachers and instructional aides, they noticed that most of the classroom teachers were people who did not live in the neighborhood around the school, and that most of the instructional aides lived in the school's neighborhood or very close by. At lunch one day Angel shared with their co-worker and neighbor, Elise, their aspirations for becoming a classroom teacher. Overhearing their conversation, Becky, a new classroom teacher, shared her story. "I started here on a conditional certification with only a two-year degree. All I had to do was agree to get my four-year degree in the next three years. I love the state college, my colleagues in the second-grade wing watch my classroom so I can make the evening classes, and we have a babysitter who watches my son in the evenings while I am at class. It is an upfront investment, and the district reimburses up to nine credits a year. I just don't know why more of you don't take advantage of this!"

Analyzing Different Expressions of Everyday Racism

Answer the five questions below. In each box, list examples of expressions of racism you think are occurring in the story you just read. You don't have to identify every possible example because it's important to leave ample time for the last question.

1. Is Angel thriving in their institutions(school/union)? What are examples from the story that leads you to this conclusion?	2. What are examples of Systemic Racism (racism within institutions and across systems of power)?
3. What are examples of Individual Racism (racism between individuals)?	4. What race and gender is Angel? What evidence from the story leads you to these conclusions?

5. As a UniServ Director, what is your role in interrupting the instances of racism that you recognize?

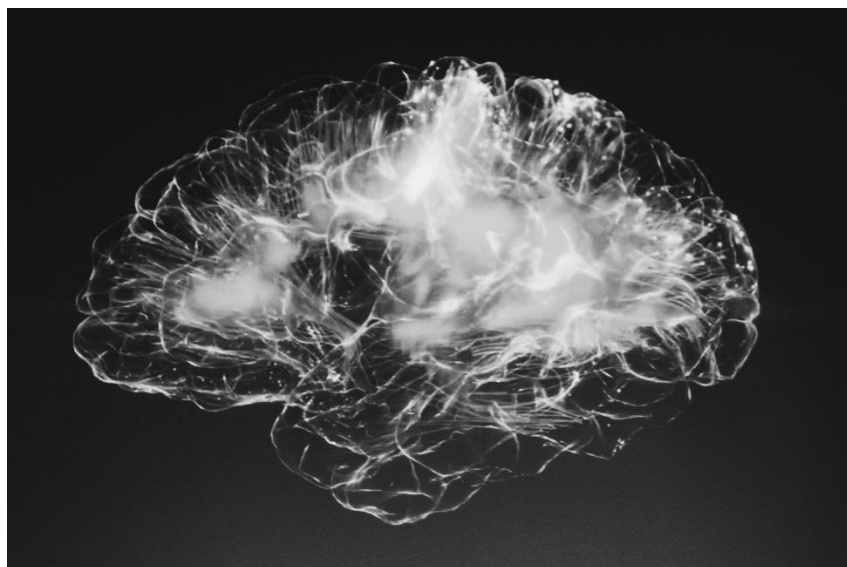


WRITTEN BY

National Equity Project<https://medium.com/national-equity-project/implicit-bias-structural-racism-6c52cf0f4a92>

Don't Talk about Implicit Bias Without Talking about Structural Racism

by [Kathleen Osta](#) and [Hugh Vasquez](#), [National Equity Project](#)



[Implicit bias has been in the news](#) a lot lately. At the [National Equity Project](#), we think it is an important topic that warrants our attention, but it is critical that any learning about implicit bias includes both clear information about the neuroscience of bias *and* the context of structural racism that gave rise to and perpetuates inequities and harmful racial biases. As leaders for equity, we have to examine, unpack and mitigate our own biases *and* dismantle the policies and structures that hold inequity in place. We call this leading from the inside-out.

Most work on implicit bias focuses on increasing awareness of individuals in service of changing how they view and treat others. This is important, but insufficient to advancing greater equity of opportunity, experience, and outcomes in our institutions and communities. Rather, in order to lead to meaningful change, any exploration of implicit bias must be situated as part of a much larger conversation about how current inequities in our institutions came to be, how they are held in place, and what our role as leaders is in perpetuating inequities despite our good intentions. Our success in creating organizations, schools, and communities in which everyone has access to the opportunities they need to thrive depends on our willingness to confront the history and impacts of structural racism, learn how bias (implicit *and* explicit) operates, and take action to interrupt inequitable practices at the interpersonal, institutional and structural level.

We believe the work we need to do begins on the inside — inside of ourselves, inside of our own organizations, and in our own communities. We offer the metaphor of a window and a mirror ([developed by Emily Style of the SEED Project](#)) for increasing our equity consciousness and understanding what is needed to take effective leadership for equity. Each of us needs to look in the mirror to notice how our particular lived experiences have shaped our beliefs, attitudes, and biases about ourselves and others. And, with increased knowledge of ourselves, we also need to look out the window to understand how racism, classism, sexism and other forms of systemic oppression operate in our institutions to create systemic advantage for some groups (white, male, heterosexual, cisgender, etc.) and disadvantage for other groups (people of color, women, LGBTQ+ people, etc.) in every sector of community life.

Kathleen: As a white woman, my own work on implicit bias starts with myself and a look into when and how, despite my twenty five years of working in the “equity” field, my own thoughts and decision making can be impacted by implicit bias. For example, when out for a run recently, I saw a woman who appeared to be Latina walking out of her home. The immediate thought that popped into my head was “housekeeper.” I had to stop and consider, how **did that happen?** Regardless of my stated and lived commitment to fairness and justice, my close relationships with Latinx friends and colleagues, and my knowledge of implicit bias, my brain made a potentially harmful snap judgment about who someone was.

Hugh: I am a mixed heritage Latino. Years ago I was co-directing a youth program that focused on what we called “unlearning racism.” We worked with teenagers to develop their consciousness about oppression, build alliances across race, gender and other social identities, and create young leaders who would work to eliminate racism. As adults running this program, we went through intensive training to become conscious of our own racial identities and work to eliminate our biases so that we could help youth eliminate theirs. One hot summer afternoon I was driving to lunch, windows down. I stopped at a red light and I immediately noticed 3 young African American boys crossing the street in the crosswalk in front of my car. They were 6th graders, 11 or 12 years old. As they crossed, one of them looked at me and yelled “go ahead, roll up your windows!” I was livid with him for assuming I would be afraid and roll up my windows out of fear. But as they walked past me and finished crossing the street, I calmed down, stopped staring at them, and was shocked to see that my hand had moved from the steering wheel to the window switch and I was ready to roll up the window. I had moved my hand to roll up the window without conscious awareness that I had done so. Even after all my training and consciousness raising to eliminate racism, my unconscious mind reacted with fear to these young African American boys. How could this happen?

To understand how this happens, it is important to understand that our brain is like an iceberg with the conscious part of our brain being the smaller part of the iceberg that we can see above the water line, while the larger part of the iceberg, where our unconscious processing takes place, is below the water line. Research shows that the unconscious mind absorbs millions of bits of sensory information through the nervous system per second. Our conscious minds are processing only a small fraction of this information and doing so much more slowly and less efficiently than our unconscious minds. This means that we have a lot going on in our brains that we are not consciously aware of. Have you ever driven all the way home from work, but not had any memory of doing so? Your brain was processing all of the

information needed and guiding your decision making for your safe arrival home even when your conscious mind was not active. In order to process all of the information needed to survive, our brain creates shortcuts to quickly assess our environment and respond in ways that keep us safe from danger. For example, if you were walking down a path or on a street and heard a strange noise or a rustling in the bushes, your amygdala would immediately send a danger alert which would activate your fight, flight, or freeze response. This would all happen before you had *consciously* processed the danger. If we were to count on the much slower processing of our conscious brain in these instances of perceived danger, the human race wouldn't have survived very long.

How does all of this connect to implicit bias and structural racism? Let's start with a definition of implicit bias:

Implicit Bias is the process of associating stereotypes or attitudes towards categories of people *without conscious awareness*.

Note that this is not the same as explicit, conscious racism and other forms of conscious bias which still exist and need to be addressed. Here, we are talking about people who consciously and genuinely believe in fairness, equity, and equality, but despite these stated beliefs, hold unconscious biases that can lead us to react in ways that are at odds with our values. These unconscious biases can play out in our decision making regarding who we hire for a job or select for a promotion, which students we place in honors classes and who we send out of the classroom for behavior infractions, and which treatment options we make available to patients. We know from extensive research that this kind of biased decision making plays out all the time in our schools, in hospitals, in policing, and in places of employment. The question is not *if* it is happening, it is *when* is it happening and what can we do about it.

Implicit bias and its effects play out through three keys processes: **Priming**, **Associations**, and **Assumptions**. **Priming** is a psychological phenomena in which a word, image, sound, or any other stimulus is used to elicit an associated response. Some of the best examples of priming are in product advertising in which advertisers prime us to feel an affinity or emotional connection to a particular brand that leads us to choose that brand over others even when there is actually no difference between the products. We buy Nikes because we are compelled to "Just do it." We think we are consciously choosing, but our unconscious mind is doing the shopping. But product selection is not the only thing influenced by priming — so are our beliefs, views and feelings about others.

The **Associations** we hold about groups of people are created and reinforced through priming. Associations occur without conscious guidance or intention. [For example, the word NURSE is recognized more quickly following the word DOCTOR than following the word BREAD.](#) We associate two words together because our unconscious mind has been wired to do so. **Quick — what do cows drink?** Not milk! But we have a strong association in our brain between cows and milk. (Cows drink water.)

When it comes to people, the associations our brain makes works the same way, creating shortcuts based on how we have been primed. The way our brains create shortcuts to quickly make sense of data is innate. *How* we have been primed to make harmful associations about different categories of people is not, but is rather the result of messaging, policies and practices that have been applied throughout history to include or exclude groups of people.

The United States has a long history of systemic racism — since the founding of the country stories that dehumanized African Americans and Native peoples were used to justify genocide, slavery, racial segregation, mass incarceration, and police brutality. Negative and dehumanizing stereotypes about women and people of color and stories that “other” are rampant in the news media and in popular culture. For example, we have been primed throughout history by our own government, by popular culture, and through the media to think of African American people as less intelligent, aggressive, and more likely to commit crime. We have received unrelenting messages that people who are immigrating to the United States from Central America and Mexico are criminals. Likewise, we have been primed to think of women as less competent, overly emotional, and their bodies as objects to be judged. For every stigmatized group of people, we have been repeatedly exposed to stereotypes that most of us can readily name that have been used to justify policies that have further stigmatized and marginalized.

“Implicit biases come from the culture. I think of them as the thumbprint of the culture on our minds. Human beings have the ability to learn to associate two things together very quickly — that is innate. What we teach ourselves, what we choose to associate is up to us.”

- Dr. Mahzarin R. Banaj

Think back to the autopilot moments we shared in our own stories. Consciously, we knew that the woman coming out of the house was most likely the homeowner, on her way to work, and that the boys crossing the street were simply on their way back to school, but our unconscious brain created shortcuts based on repeated priming about who Latina women and Black boys are — thus producing harmful associations and reactions in both of us. This priming is then reinforced by the current structural arrangements in our communities in which people of color and people living in poverty have been disproportionately cut-off from high quality educational experiences and high-paying jobs. Consider who we most often see cleaning our hotel rooms, busing our tables, and landscaping yards and who we most often see being sent out of classrooms, pulled over by police and jailed. The more we see (or hear) two things together, the stronger the association — this is the way neural pathways are built. Brain cells that fire together, wire together. **What associations are being created in our brains based on how we are primed through everyday experiences in our own communities, through news coverage, advertising and other forms of media?**

Our brain is scanning our environment for who belongs (and is safe) and who is “other” (and a potential threat or dangerous). *Who* we come to categorize as belonging or threatening is *learned* as a result of structural inequities and messaging we have received about categories of people. These harmful associations we carry can lead us to make **Assumptions** that have life and death consequences for people of color. We saw this when:

- [The police were called by a Starbucks manager](#) because she made the association that Rashon Nelson and Donte Robinson, two African American men, were dangerous, resulting in their arrest when they were simply waiting to meet someone.
- Two Native American young men, Kanewakeron Thomas Gray and Shanahwati Lloyd Gray, drove from New Mexico to go [on a college tour at Colorado State University](#) and a white mother who was also on the tour called campus security because they looked like “they don’t belong, they were quiet

and creepy and really stand out.” Security came and questioned the young men and confirmed that they were registered for the campus visit, but by the time they were released, the tour had gone ahead without them and they ended up driving home without a tour at all.

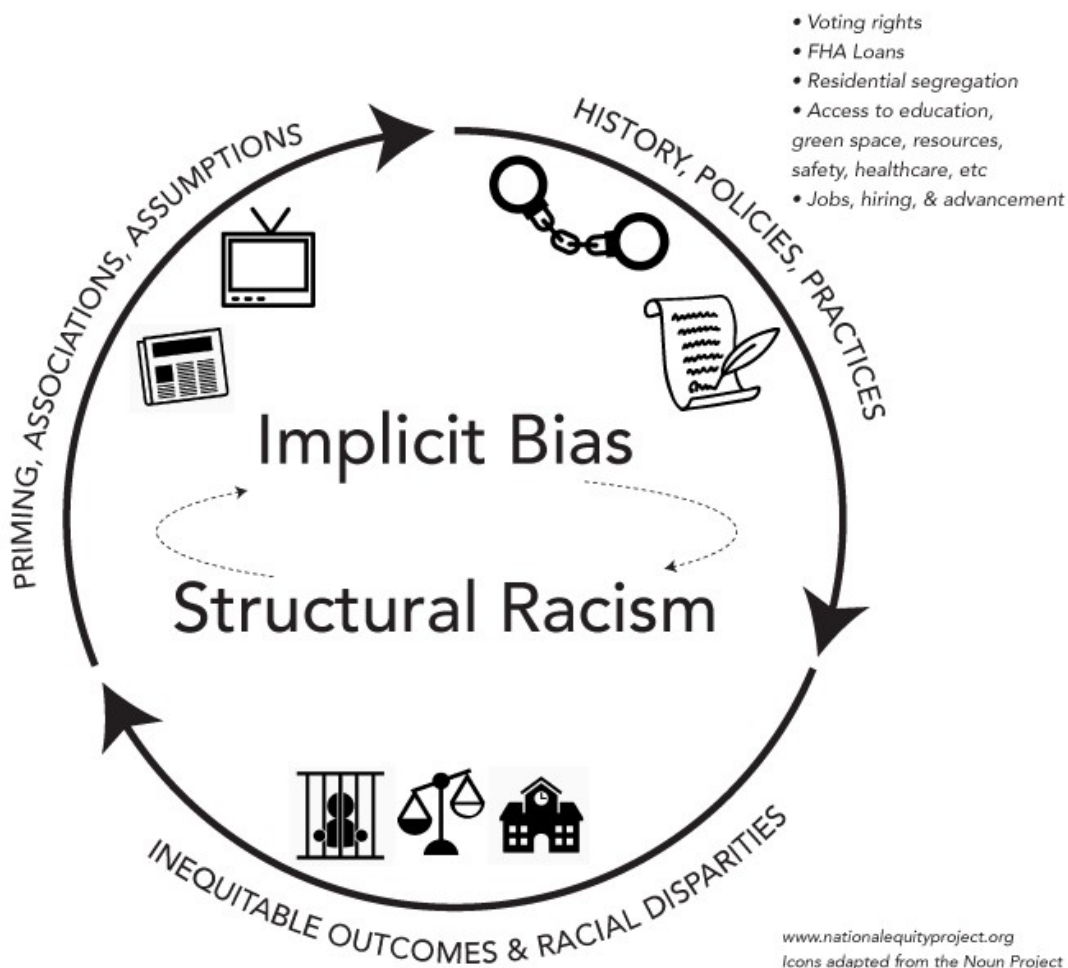
- [Tamir Rice, a 12 year old African American boy was in a park with a toy gun](#) when police drove up and within **two seconds** of exiting the vehicle an officer shot and killed him.

These incidents and many more like them sit in a larger context of racial segregation, exclusion, and systemic inequities in which society’s benefits and burdens are distributed unevenly depending one’s race. Professor John Powell of the [Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society](#) calls this “structural racialization” — referring to institutional practices and structural arrangements that lead to racialized inequities — as we see in the case of education, health, housing, criminal justice, and even [life expectancy](#) in the United States. These two phenomena — structural racialization and implicit bias — work dynamically to hold inequities in place. This is why we believe learning about implicit bias is an important, but an insufficient strategy to advance equity.

“Those who practice leadership for equity must confront, disappoint, and dismantle and at the same time energize, inspire, and empower.”

- Sharon Daloz Parks

Making progress on equity will require us to both mitigate our own biases *and* change structures. For example, structural inequities in the way we fund our public schools mean that students living in affluent communities (most often majority white) attend highly resourced schools with extensive opportunities for deep learning and extra-curricular activities while students living in neighborhoods in which we have disinvested (often majority people of color) attend schools that are underfunded with fewer academic and extra-curricular opportunities. When these students underperform, the fact of their underperformance reinforces our conscious and implicit stereotypes about their intelligence, the extent to which their parents value education (they do), and their effort. **This is an insidious cycle whereby the structural inequities produce inequitable outcomes which then reinforce harmful stereotypes about students of color and students living in poverty and which are *then* used to justify inequitable practices such as holding low expectations, academic tracking, and punitive discipline in schools.**



“Biases not only affect our perceptions, but our policies and institutional arrangements. Therefore, these biases influence the types of outcomes we see across a variety of contexts: school, labor, housing, health, criminal justice system, and so forth....These racialized outcomes subsequently reinforce the very stereotypes and prejudice that initially influenced the stratified outcomes.”

- john powell

As leaders for equity it is our responsibility to look at how our own biases and biases within our organizations contribute to structural inequities and advocate for policies that increase access to economic, educational, and political opportunity. We must expand our notion of success to include diverse perspectives and values. In education, this means providing [culturally sustaining](#) opportunities for rigorous intellectual work and healthy social emotional and physical development for all of our young people, not just those born in affluent zip codes. Many schools and school districts are actively engaged in efforts to change structures to mitigate the effects of bias and increase educational equity within schools and across communities. Some examples of these changes include:

- [Expanding professional learning opportunities for educators](#) to learn about how systemic oppression operates to increase their awareness of their own cultural frames and gain strategies for building learning partnerships with students whose lived experience is different from their own.
- Eliminating subjectivity in placement decisions for AP/Honors courses by requiring students to “opt out” rather than relying solely on teacher recommendation, thus increasing the numbers of students of color and students living in poverty in high-level courses.
- Implementing policies in which the most experienced and talented teachers are teaching the students with the highest level of academic need, and not the other way around (as is often the case).
- Enacting laws that make it harder for childcare centers to expel preschoolers and creating diversion programs in which School Resource Officers refer students to social service agencies for support, instead of arresting them.
- Changing discipline policies whereby only the most serious negative behaviors are subject to suspension and implementing a system of checks and balances in which a trusted adult is called to the classroom when a behavior challenge arises rather than sending students out of class in order to mitigate racial bias.

Examples of structural changes across schools might include:

- Enacting legislation providing for competitive federal grants to districts to support voluntary local efforts to reduce school segregation.
- Bolstering Fair Housing legislation to reduce discriminatory zoning policies that effectively exclude low-income and families of color from high performing and well resourced schools by banning apartment buildings and other multifamily units in nearby neighborhoods.
- Mandating a federal review of efforts by wealthy and predominantly white school jurisdictions to secede from integrated school districts.

Strong efforts to acknowledge, interrupt, and mitigate the effects of implicit bias will require us to engage in on-going *mirror* work, exploring our own biases and paying attention to how we are primed to think about categories of people while simultaneously engaging in *window* work, looking at our current context with a systemic and historic lens so that we can dismantle inequitable policies and structures and create new structures in which we all experience belonging and can thrive.



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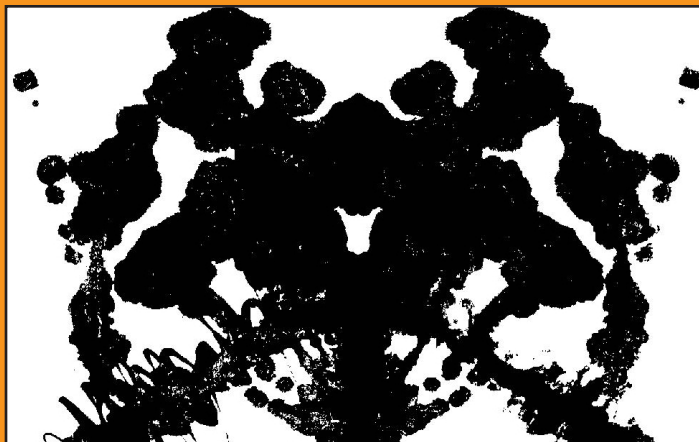
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Understanding Implicit Bias

What Is Implicit Bias



Implicit bias is a mental process that stimulates negative attitudes about people who are not members of one's own "in group." Implicit racial bias leads to discrimination against people who are not members of one's own racial group. In his book, [The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of](#)

[the Nation](#), Professor Drew Westen tells us that "Irrespective of what we may feel and believe consciously, most White Americans—including many who hold consciously progressive values and attitudes—harbor negative associations toward people of color." Implicit bias affects the way that we think about "out groups" and it influences the way that we react to and interact with out group members. Implicit bias operates in what researchers call our "implicit mind," the part of the brain that we commonly call the "subconscious" or the "unconscious." This means that implicit bias can operate in an individual's mind without a conscious awareness of this process. Westen suggests that, typically, our subconscious attitudes are less egalitarian than our conscious attitudes.

Implicit racial bias is a very complex mental process

Many researchers believe that implicit racial bias is a response to direct and indirect negative information that an individual receives starting in childhood. For example, consider a White adult who has had little or no interaction with African Americans. Starting in childhood, this person may be bombarded with distorted negative images of African Americans on television and in the news and negative comments about people of color from family members and other people who are respected by the individual. This input can lead to unfounded negative attitudes about African Americans.

As an emerging research field, there is not perfect agreement on the question of the precise process by which stereotypes unintentionally shape people's beliefs about and behaviors towards others. Many researchers and scholars believe that implicit bias leads to unconscious negative attitudes that reside outside our normal



cognition and beyond our control. Others believe that we may be aware of these attitudes but are reluctant to openly acknowledge them because they conflict with social norms and egalitarian values that are important to us. A third group of researchers urge that most people are aware that they have some degree of prejudiced and stereotypical thinking, but are unaware of the powerful influence those negative associations have on their behavior. More work is needed to resolve these disagreements in order to formulate strategies best able to fight against implicit bias.

Why should we care about implicit bias?

We must care because this phenomenon has the power to influence policies and conditions in the real world, to distort the opportunity that all Americans must have to achieve success. For example, an elementary school teacher may say—and explicitly believe—that she has equal expectations for all of her students, while in fact, implicit racial bias lowers her expectations for students of color, stimulates subtle differences in the way she behaves toward these students and lowers the academic performance of these students.

In the criminal justice system, implicit racial bias can negatively influence decisions made by judges. For example, research on capital punishment shows that killers of White victims are more likely to be sentenced to death than are killers of Black victims and that Black defendants are more likely than White defendants to receive the death penalty (R. Richard Banks, et al., “Discrimination and Implicit Bias in a Racially Unequal Society,” 94 CAL. L. REV. 1169, 1175: 2006). Other research shows that defendants with more afro-centric facial features are given longer sentences than defendants with fewer afro-centric features. (William T. Pizzi, Irene V. Blair and Charles M. Judd. “Discrimination in Sentencing on the Basis of Afrocentric Features.” Michigan Journal of Race & Law, Vol. 10, 2005).

Implicit racial bias can lead to devastating, sometimes fatal, consequences.

Research suggests that negative racial associations can lead people to see danger or a weapon where none exists. “Shooter studies” have documented that race affects the decision making of subjects asked to make split-second decisions about whether to discharge a weapon in self-protection. This research has established that many people stereotypically associate African Americans with violence and weapons, causing them in simulations to “fire” guns more often when presented with images of unarmed black persons, and less often when facing images of armed white persons. The February 26, 2012 fatal shooting in Florida of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African American teenager, highlights the importance of deepening our understanding of implicit bias effects.

Implicit racial bias can also influence many of the most important decisions we make in our personal, professional, and social lives: where we live, where we work, who our children’s friends are, who our friends are, which political candidates we vote for, what social programs we support, etc. For most Americans all of these issues are influenced by racial attitudes. Implicit bias distorts these attitudes and limits the opportunity that each of us has to live a fully engaged life.

At the Kirwan Institute our work on structural racialization has shown us that the systematic processes which create and perpetuate racial inequality most often operate without racist intent. We know that racialized outcomes do not require racist actors. However, we are becoming increasingly aware that the ways in which individuals think about, talk about and act on race do have significant implications for social justice and access to opportunity. Through our emerging research on implicit bias we know that attitudes about race do influence our position on critical issues involving race—issues like affordable housing, affirmative action, school integration, and even the size and role of government. As we strive to create a just and inclusive society where all people and communities have opportunity to succeed we are working to expand the understanding of implicit bias, to expose the many ways that this phenomenon creates and reinforces racialized barriers to opportunity in critical life domains and to conceive of and implement interventions that have the power to reduce the influence of implicit bias in the real world.



The Kirwan Institute
works to **create** a just
and inclusive society where all people
and communities have
opportunity
to succeed.



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PART II

RACIAL ANXIETY

Racial anxiety can be acute, experienced as physiological threat (Blascovich et al., 2001; Page-Gould et al., 2008) and cognitive depletion (Richeson & Shelton, 2003; Richeson et al., 2003; Richeson & Shelton, 2007) in anticipation of and following an interracial interaction. When people experience the physical symptoms of anxiety during a cross-racial interaction, they often distance themselves, are less apt to share eye contact, and use a less friendly and engaging verbal tone – behaviors which can obviously undermine an interaction (Dovidio et al., 2002).

Racial anxiety matters on multiple levels, and its effects can spill over into virtually every important life domain. Members of both racial minority and majority groups may experience racial anxiety and its concomitant discomfort in cross-race interactions; moreover, members of racial minority groups may be subject to adverse effects of the racial anxiety among members of the dominant group with whom they interact. Given that white people continue to be overrepresented in positions of greater power, their anxiety can have significant consequences for members of other racial and ethnic groups. What this means is, for example, a black patient may suffer the effects of her own experience of interracial anxiety with a white doctor, but may also suffer the effects of the doctor's anxiety. As a result, it is in everyone's interest to identify and address the effects of racial anxiety.

A. INTERGROUP ANXIETY AS AN EVERYDAY OBSTACLE

Beginning in the 1980s with work by Walter and Cookie Stephan (Stephan & Stephan, 1984, 1985), social scientists have developed a robust literature addressing the fact that people often feel more anxious when interacting with “out-group” members than with “in-group” members. In a review of the literature, Tropp and Page-Gould (2014) explain that this observation has been replicated with a “host of convergent measures of anxiety, ranging from self-reported anxiety (Britt et al., 1996; Stephan & Stephan, 1985) to anxious behaviors (Dovidio et al., 2006; Dovidio et al., 2002) and physiological stress responses” (Amodio, 2009; Mendes et al., 2007; Page-Gould et al., 2008, Tropp & Page-Gould, 2014). Although the studies are not limited to race as the source of stigma (Blascovich et al., 2001), we are particularly interested in the application of this research to racial dynamics because race – and specifically relations between whites and African Americans – has represented such a salient divide in the United States.

Who Experiences Racial Anxiety

Racial anxiety, like implicit bias, is common, but not experienced by everyone. Some people may be more susceptible to experiencing racial anxiety, and it may have different underlying causes for the people who do experience it. For some, bias or prejudice is the source of the racial anxiety (Page-Gould et al., 2008; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). However, for others, it is the concern that the interracial interaction will not go well – rather than bias – that causes the racial anxiety (Tropp & Page-Gould, 2014; Trawalter et al., 2009). As we will discuss below in the interventions section, it is important to know the source of the anxiety to know how best to ameliorate it.

Other research emphasizes the role of both actual and perceived psychological threat as fundamental components of intergroup anxiety (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Tropp & Page-Gould, 2014). This model when applied to race can be applicable both to whites as the dominant group and people of color as stigmatized groups. Among many whites, racial or ethnic prejudice predicts anxiety. These whites are more likely to perceive interactions with people of color as demanding (Dovidio et al., 2002; Trawalter et al., 2009), and they are worried about how they will be seen during the interactions (Amodio, 2009; Vorauer, 2006; Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001; Vorauer et al., 2000). In a set of intriguing studies, prejudiced whites were actually likely to spend more cognitive resources trying to make the interaction go smoothly (Richeson & Shelton, 2003; Richeson et al., 2003; Richeson & Shelton, 2007). People with little prior contact with out-group members have also been found to react viscerally and more negatively to cross-group interactions (Blascovich et al., 2001; Mendes et al., 2002).

On average, people of color have more contact with whites and, as a result, may feel a greater sense of efficacy about interacting with whites (Doerr et al., 2011). Nonetheless, they may still experience anxiety when they expect to be rejected on the basis of race or ethnicity (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2006; Page-Gould et al., 2008; Pinel, 1999; Stephan & Stephan, 1989; Tropp, 2003).

Some may find it surprising that whites may experience “racial anxiety” given the continued dominance of whites generally – but in light of the importance of the prevailing social norm of egalitarianism, many whites truly fear being perceived as racist. Racial anxiety is more likely when whites are externally motivated not to appear racist than whites who are internally motivated by egalitarianism (Plant et al., 2008). In other words, we can be focused on not being racist – or focused on whether other people see us as racist. The latter can translate into the phenomenon of stereotype threat described in the next part of the report.

B. ANXIETY FEEDBACK LOOPS IN INTERACTION

People who are experiencing racial anxiety exhibit some of the same behaviors as those who have implicit bias – even though, as discussed above, the source may be different. Researchers have found that people who feel anxious during interactions with people of other races or ethnicities are less likely to seek out or engage in subsequent interactions (Butz & Plant, 2011; Dovidio et al., 2006; Plant & Butz, 2006; Plant & Devine, 2003; Tropp, 2003). A negative experience with someone of another race or ethnicity can trigger a negative feedback loop where the experience of racial anxiety predicts fewer and lower-quality interactions with other racial and ethnic groups in the future (Paolini et al., 2006; Tropp & Page-Gould, 2014). This negative feedback loop creates a barrier to effective interracial contact because people with limited contact experience are more likely to have awkward or negative interactions (Blascovich et al., 2001) and so will be more motivated to avoid future contact.

Conversely, prior positive interracial contact can have a wide range of positive consequences, including improved interracial attitudes, more successful interracial interactions, and following from these, more positive inclinations toward future interracial interactions (Levin et al., 2003; Swart et al., 2011; Tropp, 2003). Importantly, prior positive experiences with people of other races or ethnicities can reduce the effects of later negative experience (Paolini et al., 2014). These positive interactions also translate into greater resilience when a later interracial experience is stressful (Page-Gould et al., 2010).

The positive effects of interracial or ethnic contacts may not occur immediately, particularly among strangers after a single brief meeting (Page-Gould et al., 2008; Tropp & Page-Gould, 2014). Rather, these effects generally develop over time (Page-Gould et al., 2008). In other words, people become more comfortable and

As a result of “pluralistic ignorance,” whites and people of color are apt to behave in ways that confirm the other’s fears.

experience less racial anxiety if they have repeated interactions with members of other groups rather than meeting just once. Indeed, even people with high levels of implicit bias who showed physiological signs of stress during a first interracial interaction showed fewer signs of stress in a second meeting, and by the third meeting showed no more stress than they would have with a person of the same race

(Page-Gould et al., 2008). Stress levels during interracial experiences are important because they make that particular interaction more successful – but also because the lower stress level of one interracial interaction has been shown to make later interracial experiences more positive (Page-Gould et al., 2010).

C. DISTINGUISHING EFFECTS OF RACIAL ANXIETY AND BIAS

When we experience racial anxiety, we may not recognize it – and we are even less likely to recognize that the person with whom we are interacting may be experiencing it as well. Thus, as a result of “pluralistic ignorance,” whites and people of

color are apt to behave in ways that confirm the other's fears – failing to initiate contact through open body language, eye contact, and other non-verbal signals of welcoming interaction (Shelton & Richeson, 2005). The absence of this kind of body language makes both people appear unfriendly or unwelcoming. In sum, racial anxiety begets more racial anxiety.

Pluralistic ignorance occurs when “people observe others behaving similarly to themselves but believe that the same behaviors reflect different feelings and beliefs” (Shelton & Richeson, 2005). Shelton and Richeson have concluded that both whites and blacks report interest in contact with one another, but both believe the other group will have little interest in interaction with them (Shelton & Richeson, 2005). The studies confirmed that both attributed their own lack of action to engage in interracial contact to be a fear of rejection, but presume that inaction by the member of the other racial group reflects lack of interest.

These tendencies are particularly acute in the context of race. Because of continued patterns of segregation, people are particularly likely to generalize from a single act committed by an individual member of a different race to the larger racial group to which that individual belongs. For instance, a white person who does not feel welcome to sit at a table with a black person may generalize this experience into a broad conclusion that black people as a group are not interested in interacting with whites. Similarly, a black person who observed the white person walking by the open seat at the table will conclude that whites as a group are not interested in interacting with black people.

Such interactional dynamics may seem trivial when compared to structural challenges, but they are crucially important in our day-to-day experiences, including interactions with teachers, employers, and health care providers.

America's War on Black Trans Women

by Annamarie Forestiere | Sep 23, 2020 | [Amicus](#), [Congress](#), [Criminal Justice](#), [Executive Branch](#), [Human Rights](#), [Legislation](#), [LGBTQ Rights](#), [Policing and Law Enforcement](#), [Poverty and Economic Justice](#), [Racial Justice](#), [Sex Equality](#) |

Photo by [noah eleazar](#) on [Unsplash](#)



The Problem: America's Treatment of Black Trans Women

Violence against Black trans women has been accurately [described as](#) "a pandemic within a pandemic." This summer, [six Black trans women](#), all under the age of 32, were murdered in the span of nine days. Their deaths are part of a horrifying pattern; hate crimes against transgender and gender non-conforming individuals have been on the rise for years, with the number of [murders in 2020](#) already almost surpassing that of 2019. Of the 26 victims so far this year and the 27 victims last year, [the majority](#) have been Black trans women under the age of 30.

Organizations like the Human Rights Campaign have released [several reports](#) detailing potential sources of this violence. In particular, Black trans women are killed at disproportionate rates because of "the intersections of racism, transphobia, sexism, biphobia and homophobia." A report from CNN's discussion with Kerith Conron, from the [Williams Institute at UCLA](#), notes that the easiest answer to why Black trans women are disproportionately victims of fatal violence is that "[t]hey're black, they're transgender, and they're women. Each of those distinct identities means that they face discrimination, prejudice and inequities on multiple fronts."

The inequities and prejudice Black trans women face don't just take the form of outright violence. A study by the [National LGBTQ Task Force](#) indicates that Black trans people have a 26% unemployment rate. That's twice as high as the unemployment rate for transgender people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, and four times as high as the unemployment rate in the general population. The study also found other shocking disparities; 41% of Black trans people have been homeless (more than five times the general population), 34% of Black trans people have household incomes less than \$10,000 (more than eight times the general population), and nearly half of the Black trans population has attempted suicide. Although these statistics apply to the Black trans population in general and not to Black trans women specifically, based on how much more frequently Black trans women are killed, it's reasonable to assume that they also experience these harms more frequently than other Black trans people.

In short, being a Black trans woman in America means you're far more likely than most other people to experience serious roadblocks and harms, in the form of everything from extreme poverty to violent murder.

The Source: The Legal Landscape Impacting Societal Treatment of Black Trans Women

The way that American society treats Black trans women (ranging from callous disregard to outright hatred and violence) shouldn't be shocking; in many ways, it is rooted and reflected in the American legal system.

Take the Trump Administration for an example. The current administration has exemplified a series of outright attacks against both [racial/ethnic minorities](#) and transgender people, the intersection of which leaves Black trans women subject to abuse at the hands of the law. Earlier this summer, the administration removed protections for transgender people in the realm of [healthcare](#) and health insurance. This change in policy allows healthcare providers/insurers to refuse treatment of transgender people, which will likely cause Black transgender women (who are already [mistreated](#) by the healthcare industry) to not seek out medical treatment, a significant problem at all times but

especially so during an ongoing [pandemic](#). The administration also implemented a highly controversial ban on transgender people serving in the [military](#), a law which signaled the government's negative view of trans individuals.

The current executive branch is not the only part of the American legal system that harms Black trans women. Up until the Supreme Court's recent landmark decision *Bostock*, transgender people were not granted any federal antidiscrimination protections in the realm of employment. Not only that, but Congress has consistently failed to pass [The Equality Act](#), a bill that would provide more sweeping protections for the entire LGBTQ+ community including requiring prisons to "house transgender individuals in facilities that match their gender identity," a protection that is currently lacking and that leaves incarcerated transgender people [13 times more likely](#) to experience sexual assault in prison. The patchwork of federal laws [governing police brutality](#) and misconduct also leaves Black trans women [particularly vulnerable](#) to [violence](#) at the hands of law enforcement.

State laws also leave Black trans women vulnerable, which acts as a form of state-sanctioned violence against them. 28 states have [dangerous hate crime laws](#) that don't include protections for trans people. Several states also recognize the "[trans panic defense](#)," a claim that a defendant was driven to violence due to their volatile emotional state after discovering that someone is transgender, as a valid legal defense for violence against Black trans women. Some states are so bad at protecting the rights of transgender people that online lists like "[Where to Move in the United States if You're Trans](#)" have popped up; of course, if you're among the 34% of Black trans people who are extremely poor, or the 41% of Black trans people who have experienced homelessness (the bulk of whom are likely Black trans women), moving to safer states is simply not possible.

The message of our federal and state governments failing to protect (and sometimes actively harming) Black trans women is terrifying: if the government doesn't care about Black trans women, then citizens don't have to care either. In other words, because the *law* treats Black trans women with disregard and violence, it gives *individuals* a free pass to do the same.

The Solution: Changing the Law and Changing Society

A cornerstone of the Black Lives Matter movement and the recent racial justice [protests](#) is "[Black Trans Lives Matter](#)," an explicit recognition that even within a community of individuals who are in danger, the lives of Black trans people (especially women) are even more threatened. In fact, the Black Lives Matter movement has always relied heavily on the [LGBTQ+ community](#), just like the LGBTQ+ community has depended on Black trans women like [Marsha P. Johnson](#). The central focus of the Black Trans Lives Matter platform is a desire to change the treatment of Black trans people (especially women) in America by individuals and by the government.

Lawmakers would do well to listen to their voices.

A tangible way to increase the quality of life of Black trans women is to extend legal protections to them and to change the way that they are treated under the law. Some excellent starting points would be for the federal government to reinstate the healthcare protections that the Trump administration has gotten rid of, and for state governments to eliminate the trans panic defense. Extending protections to sex workers (or [completely decriminalizing sex work](#)), enacting stronger police brutality laws (or [defunding the institution of policing](#)), allowing incarcerated people to live in housing that matches their gender identity (or [eliminating prisons entirely](#)): these are all additional steps that the law could take to keep Black trans women safe.

By taking these steps, and others like them, lawmakers would do more than provide legal protections to Black trans women. They would also signal to society that Black trans women are *valued*, that their lives are to be celebrated just as much as everyone else's. They would tell the American people unequivocally that Black trans women's lives matter. Hopefully, societal attitudes toward Black trans women would then change too.

HRC Honors Frances Thompson, a Black Transgender Hero

by [HRC Staff](#) • February 22, 2021

Post submitted by Violet Lhant, HRC Public Education and Research Coordinator

This post is the first of a two-part series focusing on Black History Month through the lens of Black trans women. Part Two follows below.

Content Warning: The following post contains descriptions of historical violence.

This Black History Month, the Human Rights Campaign affirms its stance that LGBTQ history and Black history are inextricably linked. In fact, the intersection of Black and transgender liberation in America can be traced to centuries past. In acknowledgement of our Black LGBTQ ancestors, we are highlighting Frances Thompson, an incredible American who is believed to be the first transgender person to testify before Congress.

Thompson was a formerly enslaved Black woman who lived in Memphis, Tennessee, after the Civil War. On May 1, 1866, an event known as “[The Memphis Massacre](#)” occurred when white police officers harassed a group of Black men, women and children who were holding a street party. The group included Union Army veterans, and many refused to obey unjust orders to disperse. When police attempted to arrest the veterans, three days of violence broke out as white terrorists killed Black people, raped Black women and set fires to Black homes and businesses.

The toll of the attacks was devastating: an estimated 46 Black people were killed, many more became victims of assault and robberies and a series of arsons led to the destruction of four Black churches, four Black schools and 91 other dwellings. During the attacks, Thompson and her friend Lucy Smith were raped by members of the white mob. In the aftermath, a Congressional committee was formed to investigate the massacre, and Thompson was invited to testify.

In a conversation with transgender activist and scholar Susan Stryker, [historian Channing Joseph recounted Thompson’s testimony](#). He called Thompson “one of the linchpins in getting the political will together to pass legislation to protect the civil rights of newly emancipated Black people and also to bring political will behind Reconstruction after the Civil War.” The aftermath of the Memphis Massacre and the [New Orleans Massacre of 1866](#) led to a repudiation of President Andrew Johnson’s attempts to deny civil rights for Black Americans. Instead, support for “Radical Reconstruction” boomed, leading to the Reconstruction Acts, the Enforcement Acts and the Fourteenth Amendment, which

together extended citizenship, civil rights and political representation to Black Americans.

Unfortunately, [Thompson's story did not end there](#). In 1876, 10 years after the Memphis Massacre, she was arrested on charges of “crossdressing.” Her transgender status was subsequently discovered and opponents of Radical Reconstruction used her identity to discredit not only her testimony, but the early civil rights movement. Thompson was imprisoned, forced to wear masculine-presenting clothing and was abused while part of the city's chain gang. Upon her release, she suffered dysentery and died a few months later.

Thompson's fate mirrors the transphobic violence incarcerated Black trans women still face today. This is seen in cases like [Lea Rayshon Daye](#), a Black trans woman who last year left a letter detailing the horrible conditions of her imprisonment before her unjust death. Incarcerated trans women, many of whom are charged for [consensual sex work](#), are often placed in [men's prisons](#) where they experience high rates of sexual assault from the other inmates and retaliation from correctional officers.

Thompson's story is a lesson for our times. In 2021, [Black Americans are still subject to systemic racism and police brutality](#). Last year, HRC recorded [a record number of violent fatalities of transgender and gender non-conforming people](#), the majority of them Black trans women. Attempts to curb Black political power have also taken the form of attacks on the Voting Rights Act of 1965. That's why we must ensure the passage of [the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act](#), which would restore the Voting Rights Act and prevent voter discrimination.

Thompson's story is one of many early transgender stories Stryker recounts in HBO's “The Lady and the Dale.” ([Watch HRC President Alphonso David's interview with Zackary Drucker, the filmmaker behind the docuseries](#).)

HRC is dedicated to advancing full, intersectional liberation. That's why this Black History Month we choose to honor Frances Thompson, a Black transgender hero who fought for a more just, more equitable and more emancipated America.

Spotlighting the Intersection of Black and Transgender Identities

by [Tori Cooper](#) • February 23, 2021

This post is the second of a two-part series focusing on Black History Month through the lens of Black trans women – Part One is above.

As we honor Black History Month, the Human Rights Campaign is committed to and focused on racial justice, equity and inclusion and combatting discrimination in all forms. The past year has brought the consequences of unchecked racism into sharp focus, which in so many ways aligns and intersects with the experiences of the transgender community.

In 2020, [HRC tracked a record number of violent fatal incidents against transgender and gender non-conforming people](#), the majority of them Black trans women. This is the result of misogyny, racism and transphobia that is deeply rooted in society; we must work to end the stigma of being Black and trans and combat this epidemic of fatal violence.

As the Director of Community Engagement for HRC's Transgender Justice Initiative, I'm determined to end this appalling epidemic of anti-Blackness and anti-transness. When HRC started the Transgender Justice Initiative, we committed ourselves to improving the lives of the multiply-marginalized: those who have intersectional identities and are most impacted by the intersectional discrimination of our society. We engage in organizational support by hosting justice and advocacy summits in several cities to connect local and national trans activists to share ideas and make valuable connections. Through our [small grants program](#), we awarded \$30,000 nationally in the form of thirty \$1,000 grants to community members advancing transgender justice initiatives. To address the economic fallout caused by COVID-19, we also partnered with Destination Tomorrow, the Bronx's LGBTQ center, to create a [\\$10,000 COVID-19 relief fund](#).

The intersection of the Black and transgender experience is one that I know well. In fact, attending an HBCU was one of the major keys to establishing my own identity as a proud Black trans woman. During my first week on campus at Norfolk State University, I spent an hour sitting in front of the library watching all of the incredible, brilliant, colorful and diverse Black people that I would come to know over the next few years. It was such an eye opening experience to realize that there isn't any one way to be Black, and that I didn't have to conform to anyone's expectations of Blackness. How someone chooses to express their race, their gender, their sexuality — it's all personal! This safe space gave me the opportunity to explore by piercing my ears and trying on new clothes. Nobody looked at me like I was doing something wrong. Despite our difference, we all want to be a part of a welcoming Black community.

We know that trans history is a critical part of Black history. Consider [William Dorsey Swann](#), a Black man who endured slavery and lived through the Civil War and its racist aftermath. In the 1880s, Swann became the first American activist to lead a queer resistance group and the first known person to dub himself a “queen of drag” — or, more familiarly, a drag queen.

My favorite Black queer icon is [Sylvester](#), known to many as “The Queen of Disco.” Although he identified as a man, he found community among Black drag queens and trans women. Sylvester’s bold, gender non-conforming fashion and singing made him into a star. Listening to his music and watching him on TV allowed me to feel at home in my own identity. Sylvester died tragically of AIDS, but his story lives on as an extraordinary representation of the Black queer experience.

Without the exceptional contributions of Black LGBTQ people, LGBTQ rights in America would not be what they are today. The best way to honor this legacy is to build upon it and to continue pushing for full, intersectional liberation. In 2021, HRC’s Transgender Justice Initiative will further its commitment to supporting the Black trans community, including a stronger focus on HIV work. We’re starting with [a partnership with Gilead](#) to provide a \$3.2 million grant to support communities disproportionately impacted by the HIV epidemic in the United States, particularly communities of color. This year, we’re also working on many more initiatives focused on equity and inclusion.

True liberation requires all of us to be united in defeating oppression. None of us can be free until all of us are free. This Black History Month, we’re reminded of the invaluable work of our Black, queer ancestors and of the important work still yet to be done.

Being Black—but Not Too Black—in the Workplace

Being a person of color at a predominantly white workplace creates its own special kinds of stress.

ADIA HARVEY WINGFIELD OCT 14, 2015

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/10/being-black-work/409990/>



To be a black professional is often to be alone. Most black doctors, lawyers, journalists, and so on—those in white-collar positions that require specialized training and credentialing—work in environments where they are in the racial minority.

This comes with challenges. Beyond outright discrimination, which many still face, there are psychological costs to being one of just a few black

faces in a predominantly white environment. In a study of black professional workers in a number of different occupations, I found that these employees worked to carefully manage their emotions in ways that reflected the racial landscapes they inhabited.

In particular, black professionals had to be very careful to show feelings of conviviality and pleasantness, even—especially—in response to racial issues. They felt that emotions of anger, frustration, and annoyance were discouraged, even when they worked in settings where these emotions were generally welcomed in certain contexts—think litigators interacting with opposing counsel, or financial analysts responding to a stressful day on Wall Street. Interestingly, this often played out at trainings meant to encourage racial sensitivity. Many of the black professionals I interviewed found that diversity trainings—intended to improve the work environment for minorities—actually became a source of emotional stress, as they perceived that their white colleagues could use these trainings to express negative emotions about people of color, but that they were expected not to disclose their own honest emotional reactions to such statements.

One of the most interesting recent contributions to this area of research comes from legal scholars Mitu Gulati and Devon Carbado. In their book *Working Identity*, they argue that while everyone needs to create and put forth an “appropriate” workplace identity, for members of minority groups—women of all races, racial-minority men, LGBTQ people—this becomes particularly taxing because their working identities must counter common cultural stereotypes. For example, black men may feel compelled to work longer hours as a way to repudiate stereotypes of a poor work ethic among blacks. To make matters more complicated, such strategies can backfire, reinforcing other stereotypes: Working those long hours may lead

colleagues to assume that the workers lack the intellectual preparation needed for high-status professional jobs.

Carbado and Gulati also note that minority professionals tread cautiously to avoid upsetting the majority group's sensibilities. Put simply, they can be visibly black, but don't want to be perceived as stereotypically black. As Carbado and Gulati write, a black female candidate for a law firm who chemically straightens her hair, is in a nuclear family structure, and resides in a predominantly white neighborhood signals a fealty to (often unspoken) racial norms. She does so in a way that an equally qualified black woman candidate who wears dreadlocks, has a history of pushing for racial change in the legal field, is a single mother, and lives in the inner city does not.

The same is true for professional workers who are members of other racial minority groups. For instance, Latina attorneys may be able to advance further at work if they take pains not to speak with any trace of an accent. These are challenges in addition to the more well-known ones—the difficulties finding mentors of the same race, coping with racial stereotypes, being treated as a representative for one's entire racial group.

So what does this mean for black workers in professional environments? First, it's indicative of the degree to which race shapes occupational outcomes. In many circles, people feel more comfortable reducing racial issues to class-based ones, assuming that poverty explains much, if not all, of the differences between minorities and whites.

But for blacks in professional positions, issues of poverty are not the problem. Poverty does not explain biases in hiring, the need for particular types of emotional management, and the careful self-presentation that minority professionals engage in at work.

Second, all of this ought to encourage a rethinking of some of the existing efforts to create more diverse work environments. Do diversity and inclusion initiatives take into consideration how minorities placed in those environments feel? How can policies create not just more equitable hiring processes, but address the emotional toll of being a racial minority in a professional work setting?

In the current political climate, there is generally support for solving race-related employment challenges by focusing on job training and education—in other words, increasing human capital to improve access. Given the research, it's also important to consider how to create better workplaces for the minority professionals who are already in these jobs.

We want to hear what you think about this article. [Submit a letter](mailto:letters@theatlantic.com) to the editor or write to letters@theatlantic.com.

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HISTORICAL TRAUMA AND THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

By: Dr. Michele Andrasik, HVTN Core, Seattle, WA, USA

Historical Trauma

Historical trauma is an event, or a set of events, that happen to a group of people who share a specific identity. That identity could be based in nationality, tribal affiliation, ethnicity, race and/or religious affiliation. The events are often done with genocidal or ethnocidal intent, and result in annihilation or disruption of traditional ways of life, culture and/or identity. Each individual event is profoundly traumatic and when you look at events as a whole, they represent a history of sustained cultural disruption and community destruction.



Picking cotton on Alexander plantation. Pulaski County, ArkansasLibrary of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-DIG-fsa-8a17057

Slavery in the US spanned from 1619-1865. It is estimated that 6 to 7 millions of Africans were imported to the US during the 18th century alone. The status of slave became a caste associated with African ancestry. The rapid expansion of the cotton industry in the late 1700s and early 1800s made Southern Sates dependent on slavery for their economy. Slaves were

generally denied the opportunity to learn to read or write and were prohibited from associating in groups (with the exception (in some cases) of religious meetings). Murder of slaves was allowable if the slave was “resisting” or if done “under moderate correction”. Rape and sexual abuse of enslaved women were common. (<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery>).

In the United States, African Americans, Native Americans, and Alaska Natives have endured a history of multiple traumas. From the time the first colonists came to shore on what would come to be known as the United States, Native Americans and Alaska Natives have been subjected to:

- colonization;
- epidemic diseases brought from Europe;
- the tradition of extermination and mass homicide;
- forced marches and displacement from their lands;
- peace treaties often signed under coercion and later broken;
- Indian Boarding schools in response to the “Kill the Indian, Save the Man” policy;
- widespread sexual and physical abuse of children; and
- rates of violence and victimization higher than any other racial group.

African Americans have endured the legacy of:

- being stolen from their native lands;
- enslaved from 1619-1865;
- systematically abused and denied education;
- forced “breeding”;
- widespread sexual assault and rape of Black women;
- the abolition of slavery gave way to indentured servitude;
- Jim Crow laws;
- mass lynching;
- mass incarceration; and
- homicide rates higher than any other racial group.

The Tulalip Indian School opening on Jan. 23, 1905, and during the next two years it held enrollment of 200 students. From 1879 through around 1935 Native American families were forced to send their children to boarding schools under the “Kill the Indian, Save the Man” policy. Attendance was mandatory or parents were imprisoned. More than 100,000 Native children were forced to attend the schools, which were modeled on a school developed in prison. Sexual, physical and emotional abuse was rampant in boarding schools. The FBI found one teacher (John Boone) had sexually abused at least 142 boys in a school where the principal never investigated the allegations (American Indian Boarding Schools: An Exploration of Global Ethnic & Cultural Cleansing, accessed at <http://www.sagchip.org/ziibiwing/planyourvisit/pdf/aibscurrguide.pdf>).



Children in front of girls' dormitory building, Tulalip Indian School, ca. 1912 28.MOHA1, Ferdinand Brady Photographic Postcards, 1988.11.13

Research exploring historical trauma looks at how the trauma of these events is “embodied” or held personally and passed down over generations, such that even family members who have not directly experienced the trauma can feel the effects of the events generations later [Walters et al., 2011]. Individual trauma then becomes collective, as it affects a significant

portion of the community and becomes compounded. Multiple historically traumatic events occur over generations and join an overarching legacy of assaults. The impact of these ongoing traumas has effects on a person’s brain and body, increasing their vulnerability to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other mental health disorders [Walters et al, 2011; Yehuda et al, 1998]. This higher stress vulnerability may impair a person’s ability to cope effectively with current stressors as they arise.

From 1941-1945, Jewish people were systematically murdered in a genocide in Europe by the Nazi regime. Approximately 6 million Jewish people were killed during WWII (and an additional 5-million non-Jewish victims). Initially the German government passed laws to exclude Jewish people from civil society. Beginning in 1939, Jewish people were required to wear a distinctive sign to “mark them as Jews”, either a badge (yellow star of David) or armband (white with blue star of David). By the end of 1942, victims were regularly transported by freight train to extermination camps (United States Holocaust Museum, Learn about the Holocaust, <https://www.ushmm.org/learn>).



Child survivors of Auschwitz, wearing adult-size prisoner jackets, stand behind a barbed wire fence. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Belarusian State Archive of Documentary Film and Photography

Transmission of trauma across generations was first seen in 1966 by clinicians who were alarmed by the number of children of people who had survived the Nazi Holocaust who were seeking mental health treatment [Trossman, 1968]. The trauma experienced by the Jewish people in the Holocaust was being seen in poor mental and physical health outcomes in their descendant generations. The children of Holocaust survivors were presenting with symptoms of PTSD, survivor guilt, anxiety, anger, grief, symptoms of depression, impaired self-esteem, a preoccupation with death, impaired communication, substance abuse, and exaggerated personal attachments or interdependence [Kellerman, 1999; Yehuda et al, 1998]. Not only does historical trauma influence psychological functioning at the individual level, it also affects family level communication and can appear in stress around parenting [Kellerman, 2001; Last & Klein, 1984]. An important point is that the children of Holocaust survivors were NOT more likely than others to have poor mental health. They may have been vulnerable to higher stress, so that when they experienced high levels of stress in their lives, they were more likely to exhibit PTSD or related symptoms than others [Kellerman, 2000].

1942 – President Roosevelt issues an executive order allowing the military to remove Japanese Americans from the entire U.S. West Coast (California, Oregon, Washington and Arizona). 110,000 – 120,000 Japanese Americans were forcibly relocated and incarcerated in eight U.S. Department of Justice Camps (in Texas, Idaho, North Dakota, New Mexico, and Montana). Living conditions were crowded and often did not include plumbing or cooking facilities. December 1944 Supreme Court rules that “while removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast was constitutional loyal citizens of the US, regardless of cultural descent, could not be detained without cause.” The order was not rescinded until January 2, 1945 (postponed until after the 1944 presidential election to avoid any negative impact on Roosevelt’s reelection campaign) (Virtual Museum of the city of San Francisco, Internment of San Francisco Japanese, <http://www.sfmuseum.net/war/evactxt.html>).



Los Angeles, California. The evacuation of the Japanese-Americans from West Coast areas under U.S. Army war emergency order. Japanese-Americans waiting for a train to take them and their parents to Owens Valley. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-DIG-fsa-8a31160

Since these early studies with the children of Holocaust survivors, scientists have also been gathering evidence showing that historical trauma has an impact at the cellular level. This body of evidence shows the neurological toll of stress on the health of descendant generations. Powerful stressful environmental conditions can leave an imprint or “mark” on the epigenome (cellular material) that can be carried

into future generations with devastating consequences [Serpeloni et al, 2017, Ryan et al, 2017]. In studies of pregnant women, we see that psychological and nutritional stress in the mother during pregnancy can lead to

biological changes that predispose their children to diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and PTSD as adults. In a study of pregnant women who experienced the stress of the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001, data suggest that effects of maternal PTSD on cortisol (a hormone released in response to stress) can be observed very early in the life of their children. This highlights the importance of effects during pregnancy as factors that contribute to biological risk for PTSD [Yehuda et al, 2005]. In these mothers, the correlation between maternal PTSD and cortisol levels in their infants was remarkably similar to that reported between parental PTSD and cortisol levels in adult children of Holocaust survivors [Yehuda et al, 2002]. Knowing how the human body holds onto this stress reminds us that we cannot ignore the social, historical or cumulative experiences of stress and their impact on wellness. There is growing evidence that biological and psychological expressions of historical trauma may be partly responsible for producing health disparities in a wide spectrum of health outcomes from diabetes to PTSD.

Microaggressions

Stress vulnerability may be especially challenging for racial and ethnic groups who deal with stress daily. Non-White people in the United States often deal with the continuous threat of discrimination and distress due to continuous microaggressions. Microaggressions are the chronic and commonplace verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities and injustices, intentional and unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, demeaning, invalidating, and/or negative (racial, ethnic, homophobic, etc.) slights and insults toward people (of color, homosexual individuals, etc.) [Sue, 2007]. These verbal and non-verbal encounters most often place the burden of addressing them on the recipient of the encounter, creating stress! There are three types of microaggressions – microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations. Microassaults are characterized by explicit racial derogatory verbal or nonverbal attacks or purposeful discriminatory action. With microassaults the intention is clear and they are most likely to be deliberate (for example, deliberately serving a White patron before a Black patron, displaying a swastika, saying that being gay is a sin, making fun of people with disabilities). Microinsults are behaviors that convey rudeness, insensitivity, reflect unfair treatment, or demean identity or heritage. These are often subtle snubs that the perpetrator may not realize they are doing (for example, when a White teacher fails to call on students of color in the classroom). Microinvalidations are communications that nullify, exclude, or negate the experiences, identity, thoughts and feelings of a person (for example, when Blacks are told that “I don’t see color” or “We are all human beings,” or when gay adolescents are told, “You are just going through a phase.”)

Microaggressions are the chronic and commonplace verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities and injustices, intentional and unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, demeaning, invalidating, and/or negative (racial, ethnic, homophobic, etc.) slights and insults toward people (of color, homosexual individuals, etc.) [Sue, 2007].

There is a great deal of power in microaggressions. Most people see themselves as good, moral and decent, and find it difficult to believe that they have biased attitudes, and that they might engage in discriminatory behaviors. As a result, microaggressions are usually ignored, denied or explained away by seemingly unbiased and valid reasons. Indeed, when other explanations seem reasonable, microaggressions are very difficult to name and identify. This lack of awareness and sensitivity leads to an inability to accept responsibility for behaviors and for changing them. In contrast, 96% of African Americans reported experiencing racial discrimination in a one-year period, including being mistaken for a service worker, being ignored, receiving poor service, being treated rudely, or experiencing strangers who act fearful or intimidated when around them [Sellars & Shelton, 2003]. Experiences of microaggressions have been associated with anger, mistrust, loss of self-esteem, the triggering of old wounds, thinking about and replaying the event (“Did that really happen?”),

and triggering feelings of internalized colonization, racism and homophobia, stress, self-doubt, frustration, isolation and shame [Solorzano et al, 2000].

Individually, each encounter creates a great deal of stress. Collectively they result in a tremendous amount of trauma for the individual and the community. Again, this may have a greater impact on racial minorities who have a high stress vulnerability resulting from the historical trauma experienced by their communities.

Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care

“Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” [U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2013]. Trauma occurs throughout a person’s lifetime and is often experienced first in early childhood (or even before birth, during pregnancy, as described above) and there may be subsequent re-traumatizing experiences. Each person experiences trauma differently. Some may have few or no lingering symptoms. People who experience repeated, chronic or multiple traumas, including historical trauma, are more likely to have more pronounced symptoms and consequences including:

- substance abuse and dependence;
- depression symptoms and disorders;
- anxiety symptoms and disorders;
- impairment in relational/social and other major life areas (including treatment);
- increased risk for mental illness and increases in symptom severity;
- sleep disorders; and
- many health problems, physical disorders and conditions.

In our work, we frequently encounter individuals from marginalized communities, and it is important that we recognize and respond to the effects of historical trauma. They may not even be aware of how this history impacts them! Not only is historical trauma associated with increased stress vulnerability and trauma symptoms, the experience of trauma is a significant risk factor for sexually transmitted infections, depression, alcohol abuse, intravenous drug use, intimate partner violence and attempted suicide [CDC, 2014]. It is crucial that we practice trauma-informed care. SAMHSA (2012) states that, “A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for healing; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in staff, clients, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings.”

It is really important that we assess how our existing spaces, such as our clinical trial sites, may cause distress [Kamen et al, 2012]. This requires examining the power dynamics of relationships, the impact of a loss or lack of privacy during questioning and/or procedures, and the potential experience of loss when there are changes in staff with little or no notice. Invasive procedures, the removal of clothing, vulnerable physical positions, the gender of a provider, and being asked personal questions by someone who is a stranger may be experienced as traumatizing or re-traumatizing. To reduce the potential negative impact of these factors, we can improve and enhance the things we do to ensure a favorable participant experience by infusing trauma-informed care into our efforts.

A trauma-informed approach builds on understanding the effects of violence and abuse on a person's life and development [Machtinger et al, 2015; SAMHSA]. It is rooted in a strength-based empowerment model, which fosters growth, and recognizes and promotes strength and resiliency. It is important to be aware of the fact that behaviors have traditionally been viewed through a pathological lens. This means thinking a person is at fault for their reactions or that there is something wrong with them, leading to labelling people as problematic or difficult. In reality, they may just be unsuccessful at coping with a situation that may (or may not) have the outcome that an individual wanted.

To get started on a path toward trauma-informed care, it is important that every member of the clinic team participate in training to learn about the impact of trauma on the health and wellbeing of providers, staff and participants. Training will help clinic staff develop skills to communicate more effectively with participants and with each other. As the clinic team continues down its path to trauma-informed care it will be important to identify clinic champions who will sustain trauma-informed care approaches over time. These individuals would identify and develop partnerships with local trauma and service organizations, and work collaboratively to develop procedures for providing referrals and responding to a participant's needs [Elliot et al, 2005].

The key steps to a trauma-informed approach are:

1. Create a safe environment.
2. Prevent practices that re-traumatize people who have histories of trauma and are engaging in clinical trial research.
3. Build on the strengths and resilience of the individual in the context of their environments and communities.
4. Endorse trauma-informed principles in the clinic through support, consultation and supervision of staff.
5. Recognize that trauma-related symptoms and behaviors originate from adapting to traumatic experiences.
6. Create collaborative relationships and participation opportunities.
7. Use a strengths-focused perspective: promote resilience.

In our communities, there are many people who not only carry the burden of historical trauma, but must also navigate a disproportionate amount of daily stressors. To improve the health of our collective community, we must strive to make every effort to understand how human beings take in and hold onto trauma and stress so that we can avoid traumatizing and re-traumatizing one another.

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FEATURE

What Is White Privilege, Really?

Recognizing white privilege begins with truly understanding the term itself.

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Illustration by Marcin Wolski

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Today, white privilege is often described through the lens of Peggy McIntosh's groundbreaking essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." Originally published in 1988, the essay helps readers recognize white privilege by making its effects personal and tangible. For many, white privilege was an invisible force that white people needed to recognize. It was being able to walk into a store and find that the main displays of shampoo and panty hose were catered toward your hair type and skin tone. It was being able to turn on the television and see people of your race widely represented. It was being able to move through life without being racially profiled or unfairly stereotyped. All true.

This idea of white privilege as unseen, unconscious advantages took hold. It became easy for people to interpret McIntosh's version of white privilege—fairly or not—as mostly a matter of cosmetics and inconvenience.

Those interpretations overshadow the origins of white privilege, as well as its present-day ability to influence systemic decisions. They overshadow the fact that

white privilege is both a legacy and a cause of racism. And they overshadow the words of many people of color, who for decades recognized white privilege as the result of conscious acts and refused to separate it from historic inequities.

In short, we've forgotten what white privilege really means—which is all of this, all at once. And if we stand behind the belief that recognizing white privilege is integral to the anti-bias work of white educators, we must offer a broader recognition.

A recognition that does not silence the voices of those most affected by white privilege; a recognition that does not ignore where it comes from and why it has staying power.

Racism vs. White Privilege

Having white privilege and recognizing it is not racist. But white privilege exists because of historic, enduring racism and biases. Therefore, defining white privilege also requires finding working definitions of racism and bias.

So, what is racism? One helpful definition comes from Matthew Clair and Jeffrey S. Denis's "Sociology on Racism." They define **racism** as "individual- and group-level processes and structures that are implicated in the reproduction of racial inequality."

Systemic racism happens when these structures or processes are carried out by groups with power, such as governments, businesses or schools. Racism differs from **bias**, which is a conscious or unconscious prejudice against an individual or group based on their identity.

Basically, racial bias is a belief. Racism is what happens when that belief translates into action. For example, a person might unconsciously or consciously believe that people of color are more likely to commit crime or be dangerous. That's a bias. A person might become anxious if they perceive a black person is angry. That stems from a bias. These biases can become racism through a number of actions ranging in severity, and ranging from individual- to group-level responses:

- A person crosses the street to avoid walking next to a group of young black men.
- A person calls 911 to report the presence of a person of color who is otherwise behaving lawfully.
- A police officer shoots an unarmed person of color because he "feared for his life."
- A jury finds a person of color guilty of a violent crime despite scant evidence.
- A federal intelligence agency prioritizes investigating black and Latino activists rather than investigate white supremacist activity.

Both racism and bias rely on what sociologists call **racialization**. This is the grouping of people based on perceived physical differences, such as skin tone. This arbitrary grouping of people, historically, fueled biases and became a tool for justifying the cruel treatment and discrimination of non-white people. Colonialism, slavery and Jim Crow laws were all sold with junk science and propaganda that claimed people of a certain “race” were fundamentally different from those of another—and they should be treated accordingly. And while not all white people participated directly in this mistreatment, their learned biases and their safety from such treatment led many to commit one of those most powerful actions: silence.

And just like that, the trauma, displacement, cruel treatment and discrimination of people of color, inevitably, gave birth to white privilege.

So, What Is White Privilege?

White privilege is—perhaps most notably in this era of uncivil discourse—a concept that has fallen victim to its own connotations. The two-word term packs a double whammy that inspires pushback. 1) The word *white* creates discomfort among those who are not used to being defined or described by their race. And 2) the word *privilege*, especially for poor and rural white people, sounds like a word that doesn’t belong to them—like a word that suggests they have never struggled.

This defensiveness derails the conversation, which means, unfortunately, that defining white privilege must often begin with defining what it’s *not*. Otherwise, only the choir listens; the people you actually want to reach check out. White privilege is *not* the suggestion that white people have never struggled. Many white people do not enjoy the privileges that come with relative affluence, such as food security. Many do not experience the privileges that come with access, such as nearby hospitals.

And white privilege is *not* the assumption that everything a white person has accomplished is unearned; most white people who have reached a high level of success worked extremely hard to get there. Instead, white privilege should be viewed as a built-in advantage, separate from one’s level of income or effort.

Francis E. Kendall, author of *Diversity in the Classroom and Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*, comes close to giving us an encompassing definition: “having greater access to power and resources than people of color [in the same situation] do.” But in order to grasp what this means, it’s also important to consider how the definition of white privilege has changed over time.

White Privilege Through the Years

In a thorough article, education researcher Jacob Bennett tracked the history of the term. Before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, “white privilege” was less commonly used but generally referred to legal and systemic advantages given to white people by the United States, such as citizenship, the right to vote or the right to buy a house in the neighborhood of their choice.

It was only after discrimination persisted for years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that people like Peggy McIntosh began to view white privilege as being more psychological—a subconscious prejudice perpetuated by white people’s lack of awareness that they held this power. White privilege could be found in day-to-day transactions and in white people’s ability to move through the professional and personal worlds with relative ease.

But some people of color continued to insist that an element of white privilege included the aftereffects of conscious choices. For example, if white business leaders didn’t hire many people of color, white people had more economic opportunities. Having the ability to maintain that power dynamic, in itself, was a white privilege, and it endures. Legislative bodies, corporate leaders and educators are still disproportionately white and often make conscious choices (laws, hiring practices, discipline procedures) that keep this cycle on repeat.

The more complicated truth: White privilege is both unconsciously enjoyed and consciously perpetuated. It is both on the surface and deeply embedded into American life. It is a weightless knapsack—and a weapon.

It depends on who’s carrying it.

White Privilege as the “Power of Normal”

Sometimes the examples used to make white privilege visible to those who have it are also the examples least damaging to people who lack it. But that does not mean these examples do not matter or that they do no damage at all.

These subtle versions of white privilege are often used as a comfortable, easy entry point for people who might push back against the concept. That is why they remain so popular. These are simple, everyday things, conveniences white people aren’t forced to think about.

These often-used examples include:

- The first-aid kit having “flesh-colored” Band-Aids that only match the skin tone of white people.
- The products white people need for their hair being in the aisle labeled “hair care” rather than in a smaller, separate section of “ethnic hair products.”

- The grocery store stocking a variety of food options that reflect the cultural traditions of most white people.

But the root of these problems is often ignored. These types of examples can be dismissed by white people who might say, “My hair is curly and requires special product,” or “My family is from Poland, and it’s hard to find traditional Polish food at the grocery store.”

This may be true. But the reason even these simple white privileges need to be recognized is that the damage goes beyond the inconvenience of shopping for goods and services. These privileges are symbolic of what we might call “the power of normal.” If public spaces and goods seem catered to one race and segregate the needs of people of other races into special sections, that indicates something beneath the surface.

White people become more likely to move through the world with an expectation that their needs be readily met. People of color move through the world knowing their needs are on the margins. Recognizing this means recognizing where gaps exist.

White Privilege as the “Power of the Benefit of the Doubt”

The “power of normal” goes beyond the local CVS. White people are also more likely to see positive portrayals of people who look like them on the news, on TV shows and in movies. They are more likely to be treated as individuals, rather than as representatives of (or exceptions to) a stereotyped racial identity. In other words, they are more often humanized and granted the benefit of the doubt. They are more likely to receive compassion, to be granted individual potential, to survive mistakes.

This has negative effects for people of color, who, without this privilege, face the consequences of racial profiling, stereotypes and lack of compassion for their struggles.

In these scenarios, white privilege includes the facts that:

- White people are less likely to be followed, interrogated or searched by law enforcement because they look “suspicious.”
- White people’s skin tone will not be a reason people hesitate to trust their credit or financial responsibility.
- If white people are accused of a crime, they are less likely to be presumed guilty, less likely to be sentenced to death and more likely to be portrayed in a fair, nuanced manner by media outlets (see the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown campaign).
- The personal faults or missteps of white people will likely not be used to later deny opportunities or compassion to people who share their racial identity.

This privilege is invisible to many white people because it seems reasonable that a person should be extended compassion as they move through the world. It seems logical that a person should have the chance to prove themselves individually before they are judged. It's supposedly an American ideal.

But it's a privilege often not granted to people of color—with dire consequences.

For example, programs like New York City's now-abandoned "Stop and Frisk" policy target a disproportionate number of black and Latinx people. People of color are more likely to be arrested for drug offenses despite using at a similar rate to white people. Some people do not survive these stereotypes. In 2017, people of color who were unarmed and not attacking anyone were more likely to be killed by police.

Those who survive instances of racial profiling—be they subtle or violent—do not escape unaffected. They often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, and this trauma in turn affects their friends, families and immediate communities, who are exposed to their own vulnerability as a result.

A study conducted in Australia (which has its own hard history of subjugating black and Indigenous people) perfectly illustrates how white privilege can manifest in day-to-day interactions—daily reminders that one is not worthy of the same benefit of the doubt given to another. In the experiment, people of different racial and ethnic identities tried to board public buses, telling the driver they didn't have enough money to pay for the ride. Researchers documented more than 1,500 attempts. The results: 72 percent of white people were allowed to stay on the bus. Only 36 percent of black people were extended the same kindness.

Just as people of color did nothing to deserve this unequal treatment, white people did not "earn" disproportionate access to compassion and fairness. They receive it as the byproduct of systemic racism and bias.

And even if they are not aware of it in their daily lives as they walk along the streets, this privilege is the result of conscious choices made long ago and choices still being made today.

White Privilege as the "Power of Accumulated Power"

Perhaps the most important lesson about white privilege is the one that's taught the least.

The "power of normal" and the "power of the benefit of the doubt" are not just subconscious byproducts of past discrimination. They are the purposeful results of racism—an ouroboros of sorts—that allow for the constant re-creation of inequality.

These powers would not exist if systemic racism hadn't come first. And systemic racism cannot endure unless those powers still hold sway.

You can imagine it as something of a whiteness water cycle, wherein racism is the rain. That rain populates the earth, giving some areas more access to life and resources than others. The evaporation is white privilege—an invisible phenomenon that is both a result of the rain and the reason it keeps going.

McIntosh asked herself an important question that inspired her famous essay, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”: “On a daily basis, what do I have that I didn't earn?” Our work should include asking the two looming follow-up questions: *Who built that system? Who keeps it going?*

The answers to those questions could fill several books. But they produce examples of white privilege that you won't find in many broad explainer pieces.

For example, the ability to accumulate wealth has long been a white privilege—a privilege created by overt, systemic racism in both the public and private sectors. In 2014, the Pew Research Center released a report that revealed the average net worth of a white household was \$141,900; for black and Hispanic households, that dropped to \$11,000 and \$13,700, respectively. The gap is huge, and the great “equalizers” don't narrow it. Research from Brandeis University and Demos found that the racial wealth gap is not closed when people of color attend college (the median white person who went to college has 7.2 times more wealth than the median black person who went to college, and 3.9 times more than the median Latino person who went to college). Nor do they close the gap when they work full time, or when they spend less and save more.

The gap, instead, relies largely on inheritance—wealth passed from one generation to the next. And that wealth often comes in the form of inherited homes with value. When white families are able to accumulate wealth because of their earning power or home value, they are more likely to support their children into early adulthood, helping with expenses such as college education, first cars and first homes. The cycle continues.

This is a privilege denied to many families of color, a denial that started with the work of public leaders and property managers. After World War II, when the G.I. Bill provided white veterans with “a magic carpet to the middle class,” racist zoning laws segregated towns and cities with sizeable populations of people of color—from Baltimore to Birmingham, from New York to St. Louis, from Louisville to Oklahoma City, to Chicago, to Austin, and in cities beyond and in between.

These exclusionary zoning practices evolved from city ordinances to redlining by the Federal Housing Administration (which wouldn't back loans to black people or those who lived close to black people), to more insidious techniques written into building

codes. The result: People of color weren't allowed to raise their children and invest their money in neighborhoods with "high home values." The cycle continues today. Before the 2008 crash, people of color were disproportionately targeted for subprime mortgages. And neighborhood diversity continues to correlate with low property values across the United States. According to the Century Foundation, one-fourth of black Americans living in poverty live in high-poverty neighborhoods; only 1 in 13 impoverished white Americans lives in a high-poverty neighborhood.

The inequities compound. To this day, more than 80 percent of poor black students attend a high-poverty school, where suspension rates are often higher and resources often more limited. Once out of school, obstacles remain. Economic forgiveness and trust still has racial divides. In a University of Wisconsin study, 17 percent of white job applicants with a criminal history got a call back from an employer; only five percent of black applicants with a criminal history got call backs. And according to the National Bureau of Economic Research, black Americans are 105 percent more likely than white people to receive a high-cost mortgage, with Latino Americans 78 percent more likely. This is after controlling for variables such as credit score and debt-to-income ratios.

Why mention these issues in an article defining white privilege? Because the past and present context of wealth inequality serves as a perfect example of white privilege.

If privilege, from the Latin roots of the term, refers to laws that have an impact on individuals, then what is more effective than a history of laws that explicitly targeted racial minorities to keep them out of neighborhoods and deny them access to wealth and services?

If white privilege is "having greater access to power and resources than people of color [in the same situation] do," then what is more exemplary than the access to wealth, the access to neighborhoods and the access to the power to segregate cities, deny loans and perpetuate these systems?

This example of white privilege also illustrates how systemic inequities trickle down to less harmful versions of white privilege. Wealth inequity contributes to the "power of the benefit of the doubt" every time a white person is given a lower mortgage rate than a person of color with the same credit credentials. Wealth inequity reinforces the "power of normal" every time businesses assume their most profitable consumer base is the white base and adjust their products accordingly.

And this example of white privilege serves an important purpose: It re-centers the power of conscious choices in the conversation about what white privilege is.

People can be ignorant about these inequities, of course. According to the Pew Research Center, only 46 percent of white people say that they benefit "a great deal" or "a fair amount" from advantages that society does not offer to black people. But

conscious choices *were* and *are* made to uphold these privileges. And this goes beyond loan officers and lawmakers. Multiple surveys have shown that many white people support the idea of racial equality but are less supportive of policies that could make it more possible, such as reparations, affirmative action or law enforcement reform.

In that way, white privilege is not just the power to find what you need in a convenience store or to move through the world without your race defining your interactions. It's not just the subconscious comfort of seeing a world that serves you as normal. It's also the power to remain silent in the face of racial inequity. It's the power to weigh the need for protest or confrontation against the discomfort or inconvenience of speaking up. It's getting to choose when and where you want to take a stand. It's knowing that you and your humanity are safe.

And what a privilege that is.

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SO, WHAT CAN I DO ONCE I RECOGNIZE MY WHITE PRIVILEGE?

Beyond recognition, white people can use their white privilege in a way that is beneficial to all people. Here's how.*

Don't take it personally or use discomfort as an excuse to disengage.

Feelings of guilt or defensiveness are common responses, but ultimately, they're counterproductive. Rather than centering your own feelings of discomfort, center the feelings of people of color in evaluating what to do with this information. If your instinct is telling you it's more comfortable to retreat or reassure yourself that you are not racist, think instead, *What actions can I take to help?*

Learn when to listen, when to amplify and when to speak up.

When people of color speak to their experiences of oppression, it's important for white people not to dominate the conversation or question those experiences. You can use your privilege to amplify those voices. Share the work and perspectives of people of color on social media. Credit colleagues of color for ideas. This not only helps marginalized people reach that audience but also helps spread their message from the source, rather than through the lens of a white person.

That said, there are also times when white people should speak up. It's not fair to burden people of color by making them always take the lead on anti-bias work or intervening when something offensive is said or done. If you hear racist remarks, speak up. If you see opportunities to educate fellow white people about race, do so. As an ally, your privilege can be a tool to reach people who may be more likely to listen to you or relate to your journey in understanding your own relationship to race and white privilege.

Educate yourself.

Just as you should not always expect people of color to take the lead on speaking out against racism, you also shouldn't expect them to educate you on racism. While it's OK to ask questions of those who have expressed a willingness to answer them, you have the power to educate yourself. Seek out books and articles on the topic written by people of color. Critically evaluate documentaries that surround topics like slavery, race, the U.S. prison system and more. We have more access to information created by people of color than ever before. Take advantage of it, and avoid burdening friends or coworkers of color with constant questions about their experiences.

Educate fellow white people.

Share what you've learned. Push through discomfort and demand courageous conversations in your circles. Do not let peers get away with problematic remarks without making a serious effort to engage them.

Risk your unearned benefits to benefit others.

You have most likely seen a viral video featuring Joy DeGruy talking about her biracial sister-in-law using her white skin privilege to question why Joy was receiving undue scrutiny from a cashier. She risks her comfort and her easy transactions with the store to point out this unfairness and ultimately receives support from witnesses and management.

There are other ways to do this in our daily lives. It can be as simple as intervening if you see a boss or fellow educator treating someone differently because of their racial identity. It can mean advocating for a coworker to receive equal pay or opportunities. It can mean being an active witness when you see people of color confronted by law enforcement or harassed by bigots and letting them know you are there to support

them and record the interaction if necessary. And it most certainly can mean engaging directly in anti-bias work, such as instilling more inclusive practices at your school or business or working with people committed to allyship and anti-racist activism, such as SURJ.

**Some of these steps were adapted from suggestions in Emily Chiariello's "Why Talk About Whiteness?"*

How to Be an Ally if You Are a Person with Privilege

Frances E. Kendall, Ph.D. © 2003

One way to work for social justice is as an ally. The gay and lesbian community realized ten or fifteen years ago that, without the help of straight allies, gays and lesbians don't have the clout needed to fight heterosexist and homophobic legislation. Gradually the call for allies has spread to other communities in which discrimination is systemic.

What it means to be an ally varies greatly from person to person. For some, it means building a relationship of love and trust with another; for others, it means intentionally putting one's self in harm's way so that another person remains safe. Each type of alliance has its own parameters, responsibilities, and degree of risk. For example, being an ally to someone who is in a less privileged position than I am requires different work than is necessary if the person has privileges like mine. There are also a variety of styles that an ally can use. Some of us are bold and audacious, others are more reserved. The common bond is that we align ourselves with a person or people in such a way that we "have their backs."

Being an ally is integral to my work for social justice: I align myself with an individual or group for a common cause or purpose. When I use the term "ally," I am not talking about love or friendship, although I grow to love many of the people with whom I align myself. I even see myself as an ally of people whom I don't know, individuals who are members of groups with which I align myself as a matter of principle.

Those of us who have been granted privileges based purely on who we are born (as white, as male, as straight, and so forth) often feel that either we want to give our privileges back, which we can't really do, or we want to use them to improve the experience of those who don't have our access to power and resources. One of the most effective ways to use our privilege is to become the ally of those on the other side of the privilege seesaw. This type of alliance requires a great deal of self-examination on our part as well as the willingness to go against the people who share our privilege status and with whom we are expected to group ourselves.

[Note: In the following descriptions of ally behavior, the governmental term "target groups" refers to those who are at greatest risk of being targeted for discrimination, e.g., people of color, women, gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, and so on.]

1. Allies work continuously to develop an understanding of the personal and institutional experiences of the person or people with whom they are aligning themselves. If the ally is a member of a privileged group, it is essential that she or he also strives for clarity about the impact of privileges on her or his life.

What this might look like:

Consistently asking myself what it means to be white in this situation. How would I be experienced now if I were of color? Would I be listened to? Would I be getting the support I am getting now? How would my life in this organization be different if I were not white/ male/ heterosexual/ tenured/ a manager?

Closely observing the experiences of people of color in the organization: how they are listened to, talked about, promoted, and expected to do additional jobs. For example, members of target groups counsel all the people in the organization who look like them even though that is not a part of their job description or have to speak for all members of "their" group or serve on a disproportionate number of committees so that there is "racial input." Few of us who are white ever have to be "professional whites," asked to speak for our race, represent our race, or offer support to people purely because their skin color is the same as ours.

2. Allies choose to align themselves publicly and privately with members of target groups and respond to their needs. This may mean breaking assumed allegiances with those who have the same privileges as you. It is important not to underestimate the consequences of breaking these agreements and to break them in ways that will be most useful to the person or group with whom you are aligning yourself.

What this might look like:

Stepping into a situation in which a person of color is being overrun by someone who looks like you: "John [a white man], I think Eugene [a Filipino] is making an important point. Would you hold your comment for a second so I can hear what Eugene has to say?"

Speaking out about a situation in which you don't appear to have any vested interest: "Jean, there are no women of color in this pool of candidates. How can we begin to get a broader perspective in our department if we continue to hire people who have similar backgrounds to ours or who look like us?"

Interrupting a comment or joke that is insensitive or stereotypic toward a target group, whether or not a member of that group is present. "Lu, that joke is anti-Semitic. I don't care if a Jewish person told it to you; it doesn't contribute to the kind of environment I want to work in."

This is NOT about rescuing or grandstanding, making a show of our support so that we will look good or progressive or liberal.

Other white people may perceive our stepping in as betraying of our same-race relationships. Comments such as "Who made you the political correctness police?" or "Don't you have a sense of humor?" or "Can't Beth [a Native American] take care of herself?" alert you to the fact that you have broken the unspoken code about criticizing another white, broken what Aida Hurtado calls the "unspoken rules of privilege." (The Color of Privilege, p. 128.) While we may choose to take this risk ourselves, it is important to work strategically so as not to put the person to whom we have aligned ourselves in greater jeopardy. The example above about the unbalanced pool of candidates is worded to make it clear that it is in the department's interest to interview and hire people who bring different experiences and points of view to the table. The white person could have covered himself by implying that his concern was for the lonely woman of color already present. ("Jean, there are no women of color in this pool of candidates. I know from talking with her that Josephina is sick of being the only Latina in our department.") Instead, he made it clear that a mostly white staff was not in his personal interest or that of the institution.

3. Allies believe that it is in their interest to be allies and are able to talk about why this is the case. Talking clearly about having the privilege to be able to step in is an important educational tool for others with the same privileges.

What this might look like:

Regularly prefacing what I am about to say with, "As a white person, I [think/ feel/ understand/ am not able to understand...]" By identifying one of my primary lenses on the world I let others know that I am clear that being white has an impact on how I perceive everything.

Choosing to make an issue of a situation, acknowledging that our whiteness gives us the privilege to speak with impunity. "As white women, because of our race privilege, our promotions are at far less risk than those of the women of color. Let's go as a group to the senior vice president to talk about the harassment we have all be experiencing.

4. Allies are committed to the never-ending personal growth required to be genuinely supportive. If both people are without privilege it means coming to grips with the ways that internalized oppression affects you. If you are privileged, uprooting long-held beliefs about the way that the world works will probably be necessary.

What this might look like:

Recognizing the lack of equitable access to education that I had always been told was present. A brief story. As I was finishing my Master's degree at Bank Street College of Education, I began to look at doctoral programs. My scores on the GRE did not meet minimum requirements for any of the programs I was interested in, and I had no grades because Bank Street used a pass-fail system then. Further, I was clear that the doctoral work I wanted to do was to create anti-racist curriculum. So, not only did I not have grades or scores in my favor, but I was also openly preparing to challenge the current educational system. I did, however, have four aces in my pocket: first, I had gone to Bank Street and that said a lot to the schools to which I was applying. Second, I had a recommendation from one of the most esteemed child development theorists in the country. Third, I was born with class entitlement and, thus, interviewed well. Fourth and I believe most importantly, my whiteness made me more appealing and less threatening to all of the schools. I know that rules were bent on my behalf to admit me to three prestigious schools. I also know that, had I been a person of color proposing to do anti-racist work, the chances of my being accepted into two of those programs would have been slim.

Mine is a clear example that our educational system is not a meritocracy. While I had known intellectually that racism is ingrained in every American institution, this was the first time my privilege was so obvious to me. In order to be clear about the role that white privilege played, and in order to be an ally, I had to give up my belief that we live in a world in which everyone is treated fairly, much less "the same."

Facing in an on-going way the difficult reality of the intentionality of white people's treatment of people of color, both historically and currently. In order to be an ally, I must hold in my

consciousness what my racial group has done to keep us in positions of power and authority. This is not about blaming myself or feeling guilty. In fact, I think guilt is often self-serving; if I feel terribly guilty about something, I can get mired in those feelings and not take action to change the situation. Staying conscious of our behavior as a group moves me to take responsibility for making changes. It also gives me greater insight into the experiences of those with whom I align myself.

5. Allies are able to articulate how various patterns of oppression have served to keep them in privileged positions or to withhold opportunities they might otherwise have. For many of us, this means exploring and owning our dual roles as oppressor and oppressed, as uncomfortable as that might be.

What this might look like:

Seeing (as in the story above) how my whiteness opened doors to institutions that most probably would not have opened so easily otherwise.

Understanding that as white women we are given access to power and resources because of racial similarities and our relationships with white men. In fact, we often receive those privileges at the expense of men and women of color. While we certainly experience systemic discrimination as women, our skin color makes us less threatening to the group which holds systemic power.

6. Allies expect to make some mistakes but do not use that as an excuse for inaction. As a person with privilege, it is important to study and to talk about how your privilege acts as both a shield and blinders for you. Of necessity, those without privileges in a certain area know more about the specific examples of privilege than those who are privileged.

What this might look like:

Knowing that each of us, no matter how careful or conscious we are or how long we have been working on issues of social justice, is going to say or do something dumb or insensitive. It isn't possible not to hurt or offend someone at some point. Our best bet is to acknowledge to others our mistakes and learn from them.

Questioning how your perceptions might be different if you were not a member of a privileged group. For example, consider what it might be like to be the only woman of color in a group of senior decision-makers who are all white and male. Would you read situations and conversations differently than one of the white men? What things might you say or how might you make your comments? What kind of support might you want if you were Other than white and male?

Keeping a filter in your mind through which you run your thoughts or comments. Remarks such as, "If I were you..." or "I know just how you feel..." are never very helpful in opening up communication, but, in conversations in which there is an imbalance of privilege, they take on

an air of arrogance. People with privilege can never really know what it is like to be a member of the target group. While I can sympathize with those who are of color, it is not possible for me truly to understand the experience of a person with different skin color because I am never going to be treated as they are. The goal is to show someone you are listening, you care, and you understand that being white causes you to be treated differently in the world. Much more useful comments would be "Because of my white blinders I don't always notice how he or she responds to you" or "Obviously, as a white person, I have never had your experience, but I really want to know how you feel you are being treated."

7. Allies know that those on each side of an alliance hold responsibility for their own change, whether or not persons on the other side choose to respond or to thank them. They are also clear that they are doing this work for themselves, not to "take care of" the Other.

What this might look like:

Remembering that we do this work for ourselves is really hard, but it is essential. For example, in a workshop in which I was a participant, we were talking about really painful stuff, and I heard myself say, "I have supported African American women all my life. I wish they would support me now." Luckily for me, a white woman who had done a lot of work on race was present and said, "African American women don't owe you shit. You chose freely to act as their ally." I thought to myself, "Oh, yeah, I have been knowing and saying that for years, but I forgot." I was grateful that there was another white woman to put me back on track, so that no woman of color had to make the effort to remind me.

Examining continually the institutional and personal benefits of hearing a wide diversity of perspectives, articulating those benefits, and building different points of view into the work we do.

Interrupting less-than-helpful comments and pushing for an inclusive work environment. We do it because we, as well as others, will benefit. We do not step forward because we think we should or because the people of color can't speak for themselves or because we want to look good to the people of color around us. We are allies because we know that it is in our interest.

8. Allies know that, in the most empowered and genuine ally relationships, the persons with privilege initiate the change toward personal, institutional, and societal justice and equality.

What this might look like:

Assessing who is at least risk to step into a situation and initiate change, conferring with others who are at greater risk about the best strategies, and moving forward. Being an ally is something like dancing in a ballet. Our moves should be carefully designed to have the greatest impact.

Understanding that this is not another opportunity to take charge, to ride in on our white horses to fix everything. Ally relationships are just that: relationships. Together with the people who aren't privileged, we choreograph who makes which moves and when they will be made. On

many occasions, people of color have looked at me and said, "You help her understand what's going on. She's your white sister." They implied that it is not their job to educate white women and that, because of my privilege, I am less likely to suffer from speaking straightforwardly than they would.

9. Allies promote a sense of inclusiveness and justice in the organization, helping to create an environment that is hospitable for all.

What this might look like:

Recognizing the expectation that people of color will address racism, women will take care of sexism, and gay men and lesbians will "fix" heterosexism in the organization and, in their stead, becoming the point person for organizational change on these issues.

Clues that this assumption is operating: the Diversity Committee is composed predominantly of people of color and white women, while those with greater positional and informal decision-making power are on the "important" committees; the senior manager reroutes all announcements of "diversity" conferences to a person of color with an attached note that says, "Thought you might be interested," implying that addressing issues of diversity is not his or her concern; men joking on the way to a sexual harassment seminar that they don't know why they have to go since they "already know how to harass;" the majority of people pushing for domestic partner benefits are gay or lesbian.

Paying attention to the days and times meetings are scheduled so that no one group bears the brunt of exclusion. For example, being sure that meetings are not regularly scheduled on Saturdays or other Jewish holidays, or before or after the regular work day so that parents have difficulty with childcare.

10. Allies with privilege are responsible for sharing the lead with people of color in changing the organization and hold greater responsibility for seeing changes through to their conclusion. Sharing the lead is very different from taking the lead. When we take the lead we get to keep ourselves central and see ourselves as riding in to fix everything. Sharing the lead requires that we are in alignment and partnership with people who are working toward the greater good of all of us.

What this might look like:

Working to build a strategic diversity plan for the organization, tying it to the organization's business plan, and assuring that the plan is implemented.

Securing funding for scholarships so that an economically and racially diverse student population is guaranteed.

Assessing current policies and procedures in the organization and changing them so that they don't differentially impact groups of people.

Intentionally using our access to power, resources, and influence to push those who are in positions to be able to bring about change.

11. Allies are able to laugh at themselves as they make mistakes and at the real, but absurd, systems of supremacy in which we all live. As many oppressed people know, humor is a method of survival. Those with privilege must be very careful not to assume that we can join in the humor of those in a target group with whom we are in alliance.

What this might look like:

Appreciating that there are times when laughing together is the only thing we can do short of throwing ourselves off a bridge. As Cornel West, an African American scholar, asked, "What could be more Theater of the Absurd than being Black in America?"

Paying attention to the boundaries of who-can-say-what-to-whom: While it may be OK for a person of color to call me his "white sister," it would be presumptuous for me to call him my "Latino brother." In some communities, African Americans call white men "white boys" to lessen the feeling of white men's power. It would be very insensitive, on the other hand, for a white male ally to call African American men "Black boys." This is because of the history of that phrase and the indication that a person with privilege is ignoring the impact of race and believes that we are really all the same under the skin.

12. Allies understand that emotional safety is not a realistic expectation if we take our alliance seriously. For those with privilege, the goal is to "become comfortable with the uncomfortable and uncomfortable with the too-comfortable" and to act to alter the too-comfortable.

What this might look like:

Being alert to our desire to create a "safe" environment for an interracial conversation. My experience is that when white people ask for safety they mean they don't want to be held accountable for what they say, they want to be able to make mistakes and not have people of color take them personally, and they don't want to be yelled at by people of color. Those of us who are white are almost always safer, freer from institutional retribution, than people of color. That knowledge should help us remain in uncomfortable situations as we work for change.

Identifying committees, decision-making teams, and departments that are "too white" and working to bring a critical mass of people of color and white allies into the group. We do this not because it will look good but because the current composition is less able to make wise decisions due to its narrow vision. While discomfort is certain to follow, the benefits of inclusiveness far outweigh the discomfort.

13. Allies know the consequences of not being clear about the Other's experience. Some of these are:
 - lack of trust

- lack of authentic relationships
 - lack of foundation for coalition
14. For allies with privilege, the consequences of being unclear are even greater. Because our behaviors are rooted in privilege, those who are in our group give greater credence to our actions than they might if we were members of groups without privilege. Part of our task is to be models and educators for those like us.

What this might look like:

Understanding that because we don't see a colleague of color being mistreated doesn't mean that daily race-related experiences aren't occurring. I often hear white people make comments such as, "Well, my friend is Black but he's beyond all this race stuff. He is never treated poorly." Or, "I'm sure she doesn't have any problems with white people. You'd hardly know she's Hispanic." Or, "He is Black, but he's really like a white Black person. He is treated better than I am."

Comments such as these alert a person of color to the fact that we don't have those experiences, we can't imagine other people having them, and therefore put little credence in the stories that people of color share. If we are to be genuine allies to people of color, we must constantly observe the subtleties and nuances of other white people's comments and behaviors just as we observe our own. And we must take the risk of asking, "What if I am wrong about how I think people of color are being treated in my institution? What can I do to seek out the reality of their experiences? How will I feel if I discover that people I know, love, and trust are among the worst offenders? And what will I do?"

Reminding a colleague who says, "She's always whining about race. This is not about race," that as white people we simply can't know what it is like to be of color. We will never be treated as if we were. While not everything is about race, there is always the possibility that it is an element in any situation. To deny that reality signals people of color and other white people that we can't be trusted as allies or as members of a coalition.

DR. SEUSS' RACIST PAST ISN'T THE PROBLEM - YOUR REFUSAL TO HAVE HARD CONVERSATIONS IS



Read Across America is upon us, which is strategically scheduled on Dr. Seuss birthday. It's also the time of year when woke white folks around the country decide that protesting Dr. Seuss is their social justice project for the year. They post about why they're trashing their Dr. Seuss collection because don't you know he was a racist asshole?

To which, I inevitably respond, "what white person isn't racist?" No, seriously, all y'all are racist and choosing to throw away his books doesn't make you any less racist. It does, however, make you the type of person who insists on talking about racism in hushed tones.

I want to acknowledge that part of the reason I'm writing this post is because I get asked about my thoughts on Seuss often around this time of year. Sesame is a huge fan of his books and even requested a Dr. Seuss themed party when he turned five years old. His books are special in our family but they also will help us discuss restorative justice as he gets older.

Now before I go any further, let me just say that yes, Dr. Seuss most certainly drew racist caricatures of Black and Asian people. He dressed in Blackface, as many white folks did during that time period. He also grew up and is, in my opinion, a lesson of what happens when you realize you were wrong and work to do better. Seuss arguably spent the rest of his career writing children's books that teach about the importance of inclusion and acceptance of others and yourself.

- ***Horton Hears a Who*** is a metaphor for the biggest amongst us speaking for the smallest.
- ***The Lorax*** asks us to consider the generations who will come after us in regards to environmental justice.
- ***The Sneetches*** is a clear stance against the oppression of Jews in Germany.

Trashing your collection of Seuss books is easier than doing the real work. It's easier to erase the books from your children's bookshelves than to sit them down and talk about Seuss' past. Instead of asking the library to remove Seuss Day, ask them to spend some time talking about the mistakes that Dr. Seuss made at the beginning of his career.

Justice is not always about canceling someone and their body of work. Sometimes it looks like providing room for restorative justice to take place. In my opinion, Dr. Seuss using the remainder of his career to focus on writing books full of important lessons is an example of restorative justice. While I wish that we had a public apology from him on the record, I also understand that the time he lived in didn't really require those statements from people who weren't politicians or in similar positions of authority.

How will our children learn from our past, if we continue to whitewash it in an effort to seem perfect?

http://mamademics.com/drseuss-racist-past-hard-conversations/?fbclid=IwAR2hHPSRGb7wAoPZj8nd8Ygn4oTxF4b_mbSTTOJIOJtDGp1GC-VvuFmAV0



Structural Racialization

**A Systems Approach to
Understanding the Causes
and Consequences of
Racial Inequity**



Racial inequity can persist even without racist intent

The word “racism” is commonly understood to refer to instances in which one individual intentionally or unintentionally targets others for negative treatment because of their skin color or other group-based physical characteristics. Research conducted by the Kirwan Institute strongly suggests that this individual-centered view of racism is too limited.

If we look at our society as a complex system of organizations, institutions, individuals, processes, and policies, we can see how many factors interact to create and perpetuate social/economic/political arrangements that are harmful to people of color and to our society as a whole. Housing, education, and health care are just a few examples of how material and symbolic advantages and disadvantages are still often distributed along racial lines.

For example, think about our suburbs. The federal government accelerated migration to the suburbs by subsidizing home mortgages through the National Housing Act of 1934. But through the 1950s, the Federal Housing Administration’s (FHA) underwriting manuals expressly

warned that Blacks were considered “adverse influences” on property values. The agency instructed its personnel not to insure mortgages on homes unless they were in “racially homogenous” White neighborhoods. Under these guidelines, the FHA actually refused to lend money to—or underwrite loans for—Whites if they moved to areas where people of color lived. Private lenders adopted similar policies, and this system became part of the “free market.”

The U.S. property appraisal system created in the 1930s tied property value and eligibility for government loans to race. Thus, all-White neighborhoods received the government’s highest property value ratings, and White people were eligible for government loans. The outcome of these arrangements is that the suburbs became a haven for White families and Black families were excluded. Today, we think of the suburbs as rich in opportunity, while racially segregated central-cities are dangerously lacking in opportunity.

A structural view of racism enables us to see the connections between seemingly independent opportunity structures

Certain “opportunity structures” lead to stability and personal advancement in our society. These opportunity structures include high-performing schools, affordable housing, sustainable employment, safety from crime, environmentally safe neighborhoods, home equity and wealth, access to affordable health care, and others. Together, these structures form a system—a “web of opportunity”—and a person’s location within this web significantly influences that individual’s chances for happiness and success in life.

If a person is confronted with barriers to success in one opportunity structure—high quality K-12 education, for example—it is likely that the person will be confronted with barriers in other opportunity structures. Some researchers and scholars refer to these relationships between structures as “cumulative causation” or “cumulative disadvantage,” as elements within the “system” impact one another. For instance, a home in the

suburbs is typically associated with good, high-performing schools; high-performing schools are associated with increased access to college; increased access to higher education is associated with the ability to buy a home in the suburbs. So, over time, opportunities accumulate for an individual because of where they live. In light of the demographics of American suburbs, the person in this scenario is most likely White.

If we flip this picture, we see that living in a highly segregated and isolated inner-city neighborhood is associated with poor-performing schools; poor performing schools are associated with high drop-out rates; high drop-out rates are associated with low-paying jobs; and low-paying jobs are associated with living in segregated inner-city neighborhoods. These disadvantages accumulate over time. In light of the demographics of racial segregation in U.S. metropolitan areas, the people impacted by this story are most likely Black or Latino.

Eliminating barriers to opportunity takes a systems approach



Consider disparities in health between White and Black Americans. These differences are well documented. African Americans have a lower life expectancy, higher levels of hypertension, obesity, and diabetes, higher rates of premature births, and the list goes on. Approaching solutions to these health disparities without a systems perspective is problematic. A systems analysis tells us that the health of any individual at any

point in time is a reflection of where that individual resides, not only in the literal sense—suburbs, segregated inner-city, rural areas—but where the individual resides in the complex web of opportunity. With a systems approach to these problems, we understand that an individual’s health is directly linked to his or her diet; that diet is directly linked to an individual’s educational attainment; and that educational attainment is directly linked to where one resides. Researchers call these multiple factors the “social determinants of health.” So, for example, attempts to eliminate racial disparities in health without eliminating disparities in education and housing cannot be completely successful.

At the Kirwan Institute, we use a structural/ systems approach to investigate the causes and consequences of racial hierarchy and disparity and to develop policy solutions. In the area of housing, for example, we support the implementation of an “opportunity-based” housing model that calls for more affordable housing in opportunity-rich areas and for a redistribution of opportunity in all critical life domains throughout metropolitan regions.

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To Tackle Racial Justice, Organizing Must Change

Daniel Martinez HoSang, LeeAnn Hall , *and* Libero Della Piana

In his 1998 [article](#) “The Last Stop Sign,” the Oakland-based organizer Gary Delgado issued a friendly provocation: organizers must directly take on race and racism.

The dominant traditions of community organizing at the time, especially as practiced by the leading national networks, prioritized issues that promised to unite neighborhoods and constituencies. The ubiquitous campaign to demand a new stop sign on a busy street was the exemplar.

The most effective organizers were said to be “non-ideological”; they avoided controversial issues that might divide a group’s members. Racial “colorblindness” (celebrated across the political spectrum in the 1990s and early 2000s) was the default organizing position.

Delgado saw things differently. He wanted organizers — especially the white, male staff leaders who were often the arbiters of “good organizing” practice — to stop dodging controversial issues associated with race. Delgado wasn’t just asking individual organizers to talk about their racial identities and interpersonal struggles. He called for organizing as a field to “proactively address issues of race, class, gender, corporate concentration, and the complexities of a transnational economy” and to “use analytical and ideological tools to develop political vision.” Welfare. Housing. Health care. Community safety. Immigration. Jobs. All our big issues are about race, he argued, even if race isn’t mentioned explicitly. Hiding from that reality only stands in the way of building the effective multiracial movements we need. Delgado expressed the stakes clearly: “If community organizing is to live, it must change.”

Organizers of color — many trained by Delgado and others at the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO) — kept pushing the field to face racism squarely, to acknowledge questions of identity and culture, to address racialized structures of power, and to take on fights at a bigger scale than those associated with winnable neighborhood issues. Powerful groups on the right set their sights much higher than putting up local stop signs; we had to as well.

Today, nearly every community organizing group accepts the importance of centering racial justice. The events of the last decade in particular — Ferguson, Standing Rock, Flint, the election of Trump, and so much more — have shattered the myth of colorblindness and post-racialism. As longtime collaborators of Delgado’s — trained and developed in several of

the organizations he helped form, Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO) and the Applied Research Center/Race Forward — we welcome these shifts.

Yet in our experience, these commitments to racial justice often don't translate into effective organizing praxis. To the contrary, many groups find themselves paralyzed in painful internal conflicts, with staff directing their energy and frustration at one another rather than forging cultures of growth and solidarity or developing strategies that enable them to make change externally. To be sure, attending to differences in politics, experience, and strategy are a crucial part of social justice work. But when they are divorced from member-driven campaigns to build power, they leave us ill-prepared to address the growing conditions of racial violence and inequality that shape our world.

Just as Delgado called for organizing to take racism head-on, we call for organizing to move from racial justice principle to racial justice practice rooted in member-driving power building.

Where We Get Tripped Up

Twenty-five years ago, the debate was around whether to address race. Now, the challenge is how to address it.

Just about every day, we hear from organizing groups that are struggling when it comes to race. These are organizations that are committed to multiracial organizing and that have made racial justice a core part of their strategy. Many are led by people of color. Yet race often comes up in these organizations not as an impetus for building community power but as a challenge to their cohesion and a distraction from their racial justice missions. Lacking a clear ideological anchor or strategic grounding, staff

leaders often don't know how to respond. The result is dysfunction, missed opportunities, and practices (like calling out individual acts of racial bias divorced from systemic analysis) that undermine racial justice goals instead of advancing them.

Here are a few examples we've witnessed:

- An organization uses a version of “progressive stack,” which, instead of encouraging staff of color to speak, prevents some white and Asian American staff from engaging in staff conversations. The stack is used as a rigid rule rather than a tool to an end. As a result, an effort to center Black and Indigenous experiences turns into a practice that leaves some staff feeling unable to contribute to the discussion. Staff tension and internal conflict increase, and the organization's impact suffers.
- A white staff person in one organization confronts a Native American leader, accusing them of “anti-Blackness” for talking about tribal sovereignty without discussing Black people. This incident illustrates how new frameworks for addressing race can shut down learning and exchange when framed as a zero-sum competition between separate groups. Rather than collectively discussing and exploring the centrality of Native sovereignty, confronting anti-Blackness, and brainstorming how the group's organizing could address both, the staff engaged in a conversation that devolved into personal condemnation separate from any engagement with members or campaign strategy.
- A group's multiracial staff of organizers resist setting goals or showing up on time, arguing that these standards reflect “white supremacy culture.” The organization has a mix of effective and rigorous work expectations. Leadership can be rigid at times and tough on the staff. But the lead organizer, a Black man, feels

accused and undermined by his staff organizers. The organizers stop meeting their outreach goals. The organization spends hours in internal negotiations about work expectations as the work suffers. Staff trust hits an all-time low.

- A community organization hires a talented organizer into an established chapter. Both the organizer and the local member leaders are people of color. The organizer engages the leaders in a discussion of policing and says defunding the police is the way to go. The leadership disagrees. The organizer tells their supervisor that the local leaders aren't aligned with the organization's mission and should be bypassed. The organization adopts defund as their position over local objections, driving some members out instead of investing in a longer-term process of education and alignment.
- Some staff at a longstanding organization refuse its model of multiracial organizing. One Black organizer announces that they won't doorknock anyone who isn't Black. The organization has not explained the rationale for their multiracial organizing model and steeped their staff in it, so individual staff act on their own conclusions, independent of any collective discussion about how differing models (including autonomous Black organizing) extend from particular analyses about history, politics, and power. Rather than discussing these issues as political and strategic questions, the staff reduces the question to a simple moralism, in which multiracial organizing is framed as inherently compromised. Their supervisor is forced to either challenge the refusal to carry out their staff role or let it slide, undermining organizational strategy and staff standards. The organizer only grows more frustrated, and the group's work suffers.

Some of the issues these stories raise concern internal organizational dynamics. Who holds power and decision-making authority? How do we resolve racist behaviors and systems within our organizations? How do we ensure that the harm and humiliation many of us have suffered because of racism and colonial violence are not meted out against others who are in close proximity? Ideally, these stories would also engage the question of how we hold open the possibility of learning and growing together, making mistakes in one another's presence and directing our collective will toward winning material changes in the world, rather than against one another.

More broadly, these stories surface questions revolving around the terms and principles on which multi-racial organizing should take place, including the concern that the very specific and material conditions of anti-Black racism will be lost in broad discussions of racial justice. They also turn on how organizations work through differences around ideology, political analysis, and program, both within the staff and between staff, leaders, and members.

These are real challenges that each organization must address. Yet organizations often limit their focus to personal attitudes and interpersonal dynamics, neglecting the structural analysis that is so central to our work and strategies. The focus on individual characteristics and behaviors slides easily into essentialism, the inaccurate and divisive idea that there is a set of traits and values inherent in one's racial identity. This understanding of race undermines an organizing theory of change and a focus on member-driven power building.

We take it as a given that people within progressive organizations can embrace racist beliefs and do harm to one another. This is the sad but utterly predictable consequence of being socialized in institutions (education, housing, media, etc.) saturated with racism. The power

dynamics of our organizations can be filled with oppressive actions and systems, which must be challenged and remade. But these dynamics cannot be productively addressed through individual conflicts and confrontations. When the organization's racial justice mission is reduced to pursuing and prosecuting such conflicts, few of us will remain, and no communities will be in any better position to challenge systemic racism and make change in people's lives.

Organizations that adopt racial justice principles must ensure that they also invest in sustained forms of leadership, staff, and member development to create a shared understanding of race and racism (and gender or class for that matter). Such efforts can guide us forward. In the absence of such commitments, we fear groups will continue to direct their focus toward individual conflicts within the organization at the expense of addressing the racialized structures and conditions that foreclose life for so many.

Thoughts on a Path Forward

When Gary Delgado issued his provocation to organizers twenty years ago, he didn't just take them to task and leave it at that. He and his colleagues at Race Forward (then the Applied Research Center) — along with a broader circle of organizers, including the three of us — rolled up our sleeves to help organizations create cultures and practices that allowed staff and members to tackle race and challenge one another, all with the goal of learning together and building solidarity. The organizational culture was a lot more calling-in than calling-out.

This helped many organizations create what we think is a foundational element of a racial justice program: a clear racial justice politics. That's not just a values statement written up in a memo and lost in a folder

somewhere on Google Drive or a web page decrying police killings. It's a vision of solidarity, an understanding of the racial impacts of policy demands, and a careful program of power-building that leaders and staff are steeped in and that they come back to again and again as a touchstone. It requires the integration of a racial justice analysis, a clear strategy for change, and an organizational culture that lives stated values and navigates emerging trends.

Building a team around this vision and this politics is key. To navigate tough questions and challenges (even interpersonal conflict), that team must be aligned around politics, values, and trust. Creating that team doesn't happen overnight. It requires organizational capacity and dedicated resources.

To build a strong racial justice program, we believe organizations also need to establish a culture that encourages people to challenge one another with a focus on collective learning and self-reflection, as opposed to shaming. Really vibrant organizations meet people where they're at and then help them move to a shared set of values and analysis.

And, of course, none of this matters if we cannot create opportunities for staff and grassroots leaders to act on the organization's racial justice politics through power-building strategies, focusing their energy externally on dismantling systems of oppression. In short, groups need to measure their progress toward racial justice by their impact on racial justice in our communities, not just inside our organizations.

Clearly, no organization is perfect when it comes to the complex and thorny issues of race and racism. Still, there are some organizational practices and principles from which we can learn. Virginia Organizing (VO) is a statewide multiracial membership organization with a 25-year commitment to racial justice. For more than two decades, the

organization has run “dismantling racism” workshops for all new members.

Virginia Organizing is clear about its racial justice commitment, even in the majority-white counties that several of its chapters are in. That commitment is not only about internal operations and practices but also about ongoing external racial justice policy goals. Local chapters oppose armed police in schools, fight for refugee resettlement, and have led the charge in taking down Confederate monuments. For well over a decade, Virginia Organizing chapters fought for voting rights for formerly incarcerated people, who are disproportionately Black men in Virginia. The organization has aided hundreds of individuals to regain voting rights through the Byzantine process in the state and was critical in getting Governor Terry McAuliffe to restore voting rights to more than 200,000 formerly incarcerated people in 2016.

This groundwork was crucial for the organization in 2019, in the wake of the revelation of Governor Northam posing in blackface in a college yearbook. Virginia Organizing had an internal process that led the organization to **call for Northam and other state leaders to make amends for their racist actions** with a set of concrete policies and practices. This was not an easy decision. Many of VO’s state allies were uncertain as to how to hold the Governor accountable, as he was seen as an ally to a number of progressive causes. In fact, many Black Virginians backed the Governor in the face of right-wing attack.

Virginia Organizing was able to navigate a discussion internally among staff and members in order to come up with a public approach that was principled, unifying, and invested in the broader goals of building power. No simple task. Lesser debates have torn organizations apart. One key to the process was that staff did not make the decision on the organization’s stance; it was member leaders who decided. Members and staff shared a

common language and framework for understanding race and racism. Staff and members agreed that they didn't want just symbolic action or individual shaming. Real change in policy was the way to make amends.

Communities for Our Colleges (C4C) in Washington state provides another example. Launched in 2020, C4C is a campaign to transform Washington state's community and technical colleges. They have already won important new legislation to fund equity programs for community colleges and are now campaigning free tuition and wrap-around services. The effort is student-led but also involves faculty and staff and draws on a broader coalition that includes organizations focused on racial equity in education. From the start, C4C staff believed the coalition needed to apply race and class analysis. Their concern was that C4C might win representational concessions without building student leadership or getting at systemic material issues affecting students. So, as they began assembling the coalition, they discussed this race-class framework individually with members. Then, in the coalition's initial meetings, the group considered and refined a statement of principles that fleshed out that framework.

This groundwork has given the coalition tools for addressing tensions as they arise. One instance involved asking a white coalition member, behind the scenes, to speak less in coalition meetings to give more room to others. Another occurred during a legislator-meeting debrief, when a coalition member said the group should challenge the lawmaker's aides for their "whiteness" and criticized the coalition for not focusing on defunding the police. Concerned these comments could derail and divide the coalition, the campaign director steered the conversation back to the coalition's principles and purpose — equity for community colleges — noting that the policing issues the member had raised required deeper conversation if the coalition wanted to do more than pay lip service.

The campaign faced another challenge after a hearing on its legislation, during which a Republican lawmaker attempted to bait an Asian American student over affirmative action — a clear attempt to split the coalition. The coalition didn't immediately know how to respond to the provocation, and they took a few hours to deliberate. One option was to “call out” the legislator and demand an apology. But the coalition realized that taking the bait wouldn't help them build their power. Instead, they reached out to the committee chair, who responded with a commitment to move the legislation forward. The coalition was able to turn the crisis into an opportunity, but only because they'd built trust around their commitment to racial equity and remained focused on their strategy while being principled about their racial justice politics.

Some Lessons

A few lessons emerge from these examples: 1) when members and leaders are fully informed and involved it keeps staff from getting way out ahead of the base; 2) long-term commitment to education and leadership development pays dividends; 3) having clear racial politics and analysis before a crisis is important to weather the storm; and 4) it is crucial for organizations to take action externally on their racial justice politics and win change that improves people's lives.

Gary Delgado's warning that organizing must change still holds true today. Racial justice is increasingly embraced across our movements, but the strategic work to live up to that vision is still all too lacking.

Again, there's no magic bullet or formula. But taking on systemic racism requires more than declaring our opposition to racism or accusing one another of white supremacy. It requires social movements to move from

<https://forgeorganizing.org/article/tackle-racial-justice-organizing-must-change>

Working » September 2, 2016

Why Labor and the Movement for Racial Justice Should Work Together

BY [Maurice Weeks](#) and [Marilyn Sneiderman](#)

The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) has made tremendous strides in exposing and challenging racial injustice, and has won real policy victories. The policies, while often imperfect, are a testament to the strength of the organizing and activism of the moment. Not coincidentally, this uprising comes at a time when income and wealth inequality are at peak levels and the economy for most black people looks markedly different than the economy for their white counterparts.

Just as we are in a critical moment in the movement for racial justice, we are in a critical moment for the right to unionize. Unions, which have been a major force for economic justice for people of color in the past 50 years, have been decimated to historically low levels.

Labor should work alongside the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition with more than 50 organizations, to usher in a radically new economic and social order. The path won't be easy. But recent history has shown that one of the ways to get at this new reality is through union bargaining. Consider the example of Fix L.A.

Fix L.A. is a community-labor partnership that fought to fund city services and jobs alike, using city workers' bargaining as a flashpoint to bring common good demands to the table. The coalition started after government leaders in Los Angeles drastically cut back on public services and infrastructure maintenance during the Great Recession. The city slashed nearly 5,000 jobs, a large portion of which had been held by black and Latino workers. Not only did these cuts create infrastructure problems—like overgrown and dangerous trees and flooding—but they also cost thousands of black and Latino families their livelihoods.

Fix L.A. asked why the city was spending more on bank fees than on street services, and demanded that it renegotiate those fees and invest the savings in underserved communities.

What was the result of this groundbreaking campaign?

The creation of 5,000 jobs, with a commitment to increase access to those jobs for black and Latino

workers, the defeat of proposed concessions for city workers and a commitment from the city to review why it was prioritizing payment of bank fees over funding for critical services in the first place!

Bargaining for the common good

Fix L.A. may seem novel, but the context is no different from many places. We have seen massive disinvestment from public services in a way that disproportionately affects black people. This structurally-racist disinvestment is often driven by the corporate interests that bankroll elected officials' campaigns and by Wall Street actors that use their influence over public finance to push an austerity agenda. Everywhere you look, public officials are making a choice between paying fees and providing critical services.

Chicago Public Schools paid \$502 million to banks in toxic swap fees at the same time that it was slashing special education programs and laying off teachers to close a budget deficit. Detroit raised its water rates and paid \$537 million in Wall Street penalties, setting the stage for mass water shutoffs when tens of thousands of poor residents of the overwhelmingly black city could not afford the higher water bills.

Wall Street and other corporations don't hesitate to profit off of and perpetuate disinvestment in communities of color, and too often we forget to look up the food chain to see that at the other end of community crises there are rich bankers and billionaires lining their pockets. Campaigns, like Fix L.A., that involve direct actions targeting banks, hedge funds, corporations and billionaires are effective.

This sort of organizing can be hard. In order to isolate workers from their broader communities, the other side has done a terrific job of narrowly defining the scope of bargaining as wages and benefits. In many states, labor laws prohibit public sector workers from bargaining over issues that concern the welfare of the broader community or the quality of the services they provide.

The theory of "bargaining for the common good" seeks to challenge this status quo. As articulated by Joseph McCartin of Georgetown University's Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, bargaining for the common good has three main tenets: 1) transcending the bargaining frameworks written in law and rejecting them as tools for the corporate elite to remain in power; 2) crafting demands between local community groups and unions at the same time and in close coordination with each other from the very beginning; and 3) embracing collective direct action as key to the success of organizing campaigns.

These may seem like simple ideas, but they stand in complete opposition to the way the power elite expects union bargaining to be done. Therein lies their power.

Therein also lies the opportunity for unions to partner with the Movement for Black Lives. For all of

their complicated racial histories, unions are some of the largest organizations of black people in the country. About 2.2 million black Americans are union members—some 14 percent of the employed black workforce.

That's a huge number of black people who are already members of organizations with the capacity to organize and mobilize. And these black workers, like all black people in America, face real challenges of structural economic racism in almost all aspects of their lives. Their communities have been underfunded; their schools are being dismantled; they face massive poverty and are under economic assault; and they regularly encounter police violence.

Stronger together

Widening the scope of bargaining in Los Angeles led to real wins for the city's black and Latino communities. The rest of the labor movement should take note. Imagine the power that could be added to the Movement for Black Lives if unions, recognizing the trauma that systematic racism wreaks on their membership, brought solutions that have been elevated by the Movement for Black Lives to the bargaining table in negotiations with employers ranging from the City of Baltimore to private equity giant Blackstone.

But unions cannot do this unilaterally and expect unconditional support from the black community.

Unions must make the effort on the front end to build a real relationship with Movement for Black Lives groups and members, and partner with them in developing common good bargaining demands that start to go on the offense against Wall Street and the structurally-racist economic power structure. There are groups of people organizing for racial justice under the banner of the Movement for Black Lives near every union local in the country. The onus is on labor leaders and rank-and-file union members to reach out to those groups and start to build a strong relationship where one does not exist. This process will not be easy, especially because of the history of racism that plagues unions, especially police unions. But the truth remains that there is a real opportunity to leverage the power of both movements to win real gains for black people and other people of color through a strong partnership.

It is exciting to imagine potential bargaining demands major unions could undertake alongside racial justice organizations. For example, they could demand that their employers make a commitment to job training programs to strengthen the pipeline for black workers; city and state workers could demand progressive taxation measures that raise funds from corporate actors to fund schools and services in black communities; teachers could demand school districts enact restorative justice policies to stem the school-to-prison pipeline; hospital workers could bargain for targeted health care access programs in communities of color; retail workers could demand that their employers "ban the box" and let the formerly incarcerated work. The list is almost infinite.

Bargaining for racial justice is a radical idea and will not be easily won. It will require concerted direct

action targeting the real decision makers in both the public and private sectors that have a vested interest in keeping racial inequities in place. The Movement for Black Lives has proven that it can execute effective and creative direct actions backed by solid demands. They are also innovating creative tactics that move beyond traditional marches and picket lines to new types of disruptive actions that make power holders directly confront those they are harming. By combining the vision and militant tactics of the Movement for Black Lives with the membership and resources of the labor movement, we can usher in a more just and equitable society.

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<http://www.labornotes.org/blogs/2017/08/wake-charlottesville-how-can-unions-fight-racial-justice>

In Wake of Charlottesville, How Can Unions Fight for Racial Justice?

August 18, 2017 / Labor Notes



How should unions respond to the chilling events in Charlottesville? As believers that “an injury to one is an injury to all,” what’s our special responsibility? Can we survive if our own unions are split along racial lines?

Labor Notes looked

through our recent coverage to find examples of unions that are proactively working for racial justice. The excerpts below show steps some locals are taking to help members learn from each other and fight discrimination right on the job. Many began after the recent wave of police shootings of unarmed Black men.

At the end see links to stories about unions allying with racial justice groups in the community, too. If you have more examples you’d like to share with us, send them to dan@labornotes.org.

TWIN CITIES UNIONS RESPOND TO POLICE VIOLENCE

by Alexandra Bradbury and Samantha Winslow, July 21, 2016

Philando Castile, an African American man who was shot and killed by a police officer at a traffic stop July 6, 2016, was a member of Teamsters Local 320 in the Twin Cities.

The union issued a brief statement expressing grief over his death. It’s a public employees local, representing a handful of police officers—though not the one who killed Castile—as well as corrections officers, campus workers, city workers, bus drivers, and even public defenders, who often find themselves opposing police in court.

The local hasn’t tried to engage members in protest, or even conversation, about racism or police violence. “Our union has traditionally not encouraged member dialogue on any

issues—especially issues as complicated as the relationship between police officer union members and other union members,” said member Bob Kolstad.

“The two groups are very isolated from each other. Local officers are very defensive about criticism of any police officer, even those who are not members. So creating an environment for dialogue on the issue of police misconduct would be very difficult.”

But other Twin Cities unions have been bolder. The two Twin Cities [teachers unions led a march](#) to protest Castile's killing; 21 were arrested.

Castile's death hit close to home for St. Paul educators; he had worked for 14 years in a school cafeteria.

Minneapolis teacher Corinth Matera said she wanted to show students that their teachers recognize what's happening to them outside of school. “Our students experience the same thing every day,” Matera said. “It's important for our union to be out in front on this.”

St. Paul Federation of Teachers Vice President Nick Faber said, “We can't just do zero-tolerance” for student discipline. Faber drew parallels between policing and the harsh discipline that students of color disproportionately face at school. Education activists point to a “school-to-prison pipeline.”

In its latest contract, the teachers union won funding to pilot an alternative approach to discipline. “We are talking about public safety being beyond our classrooms and into the community,” Faber said.

In 2015, members of AFSCME Local 3800 helped organize a rally, “Labor for Justice for Jamar,” after Minneapolis police shot and killed another African American man, Jamar Clark.

Local 3800 represents clerical and technical workers at the University of Minnesota. President Cherrene Horazuk said many members there, too, had personal connections to Castile. Since his death the local has been encouraging members to attend protests and vigils—and to wear their union shirts, to show that this is a union issue.

Horazuk said few members have opposed their local taking a stand. She believes one reason is that, in its contract campaign, the union was already raising racial justice issues, such as the low wages of workers of color on campus, and Muslim workers' fight to get religious holidays off.

So, she said, “it doesn't seem like it's out of the blue.”

HOW TO START TALKING ABOUT RACE IN YOUR UNION

by Alexandra Bradbury, September 23, 2015

[Tensions over whether unions should join](#), oppose, or sit out the Black Lives Matter movement are drawing long-overdue attention to the simmering racial divides inside labor. It's an issue where union members are far from united. In New York, the teachers union supported a march to protest the killing of Eric Garner in Staten Island. In response, some members started a petition calling for the union president to resign.

Some of the objecting teachers had police officers in their families. Others didn't see why their union should mobilize on something unrelated to schools. "[President] Mulgrew is dragging me unwillingly into the current racial and police issues," wrote paraprofessional Diane Morton-Gattullo.

In a logical first step to address these tensions, several unions are launching programs to get members talking to each other—and more important, listening to each other—about race.

One is AFSCME 3299, which represents 22,000 campus and hospital workers in the University of California system.

Executive board member Luster Howard, a truck driver, is active in the union's Racial Justice Working Group, formed in 2014.

Ultimately he hopes the group will help the union contribute to a social movement for racial justice—and tackle on-the-job discrimination, too.

But as a first step, he says, the group quickly realized "before we could mobilize, we had to clean up our own house."

Tips for Useful Conversations

- **Get people talking.** Howard says what made his workshop effective was people were interacting with each other, not listening to a lecture.
- **Ask about feelings first.** In one workshop people reacted to a film, and in the other they reacted to events in the news. Pitts and Howard asked people to start with their emotions, then talk about the values behind them.
- **Make it personal.** When the topic is abstract, people withdraw to their corners. But hearing firsthand stories can break down barriers.
- **Tell your own stories.** In the workshop, Howard described how, five times in six months, he got pulled over during his morning commute without doing anything wrong, just for being a Black man driving through an affluent neighborhood. "People were like 'Ooooh.' They're starting to get it," he said.
- **Draw connections.** "Do you drive?" Howard asked me, and then told the story of how Sandra Bland was pulled over for a minor traffic violation and it escalated into her suicide. "That's something, as a female driver, that you could understand. You build bridges, you find common ground, you try to make it closer to home."

In another workshop, Pitts drew the analogy between African Americans who migrated out of the Jim Crow South and Mexican immigrants who cross the Rio Grande today. “The whole point was, we used to be them,” Howard said. “They’re not taking your job—they’re trying to feed their families just like you are.”

A STARTING PLACE

In fact, when the racial justice group formed, the first response from some union members was, “Why are we doing this?” Howard says.

“It’s funny: a lot of people are uncomfortable speaking about racism. Even at the mention of Black Lives Matter, you see them recoil.”

Some countered that “all lives matter.” “Well, all lives do matter,” Howard says. “If you’re doing a breast cancer walk, that’s not to say that your uncle’s throat cancer doesn’t matter. But this is a breast cancer walk.

“Maybe I’m wrong,” he adds wryly, “but I thought in a union, what affects one person affects us all.”

So the group’s first action was to invite Dr. Steven Pitts, a UC Berkeley labor professor who focuses on issues affecting Black workers, to lead the executive board in a workshop on “Making Our Union Stronger: What Does Black Lives Matter Activism Mean to Us?”

Pitts showed the film “At the River I Stand,” which shows Dr. Martin Luther King’s last battle alongside striking Black sanitation workers in Memphis.

It’s an affecting film; tears were shed. Pitts opened the conversation by asking how it made everyone feel. People talked about prejudices.

It was a starting place, not an endpoint. Howard says he looked around and noticed many people weren’t participating. But in the months since, they’ve started to come around.

GETTING PERSONAL

The next step was a Black Lives Matter workshop at the local’s July 2015 conference for member activists. Howard and Pitts worked together to plan a curriculum that would encourage people to open up and share personal stories.

The workshop drew a diverse crowd of 50-60, standing room only. To begin the conversation, Howard asked people to respond to events in the news, the shootings in Charleston, Ferguson, Oakland, and Texas.

Participants broke into groups of five or six to discuss three questions:

1. How did you feel when you heard of that event?
2. What part of your moral compass did it trigger?
3. What personal experiences shaped that part of your moral compass?

“That’s how you start to get people to open up and talk about their feelings,” Howard says. “When you bring up the topic, people automatically go to their sides.... The bottom line, it’s divide and conquer.”

Members of the Racial Justice Working Group walked around among the groups to listen and answer questions. Though he’s been in the union for 15 years, Howard says, “I learned a lot about people who I thought I knew.”

One woman described how her sister in Florida had suffered a beating so severe she was hospitalized, and only her mother had stopped her from going out to seek violent revenge.

Another man told how he called police to his house, but when they arrived, they beat him up and arrested him, putting him into the hospital and then in jail.

“You could have heard a pin drop in the room,” Howard said. “That was my whole point. You see this person. This isn’t somebody on the news.... It’s not just the Michael Browns, the Freddie Grays, the Oscar Grants, or the Trayvon Martins.

“It’s happening in your backyard. It’s a little different when it’s your brother or sister.”

TAKE IT ON THE ROAD

Next, workshop participants role-played how to get these conversations going back at their own workplaces.

“When you have your union meeting, your local campus meeting, you could start there,” Howard says. Another way is talking one-on-one with co-workers, as he’s been doing with his fellow truck drivers.

“When you spend that much time with a guy or girl in a truck, you do have time to talk,” he said. “So rather than talk about how the Warriors are doing, you talk about this.”

The immediate goal was for people to go back to their campuses and get five people to tell their own stories.

BARGAINING FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

by Luster Howard, Maricruz Manzanarez, and Seth Newton Patel, March 15, 2017

Employers often use race to divide workers against one another. At University of California campuses and hospitals, we're seeing the problem get worse now that President Trump's administration is unleashing new waves of racism and attacks on immigrants.

Our union, AFSCME 3299, represents 24,000 patient care and service workers. About half of us are Latinos, and a supermajority are people of color. Our co-workers report that they're frequently attacked based on their race or nationality.

One manager, for instance, calls Latino workers "slaves." Another told a worker, "If you don't like it here, go back where you came from." Workers recently overheard a supervisor characterize all African American custodians as performing poorly; another supervisor responded, "Give me the Black people, I can straighten them out." In January one of the authors of this piece, targeted as a Latina immigrant, received a death threat on social media.

Workers of color go through countless individual experiences of discrimination like these. Co-workers may accept negative stereotypes, too. Even union activists can play into it, as when an activist insists that members from a particular race or nationality fail to participate in the union. Such divisions end up weakening us all, when winning strong contracts depends on our unity.

Beyond individual experiences of discrimination, we're concerned about systematic threats to members' well-being—especially with the president's new attacks against immigrants and Muslims. In 2009, UC police went beyond what the law required them to do, collaborating with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to detain, deny union representation to, and deport one of our co-workers.

And our members have observed the number of African American workers decreasing over the years, even while UC is growing.

This spring [2017] our union is going into bargaining again. Here are a few steps we've taken to set our bargaining tables to advance racial justice:

OPEN UP CONVERSATIONS

As described above, in 2014 we formed a Racial Justice Working Group. What moved leaders was hearing their fellow members share, "This is how my sister was beat up by cops without cause," or "This is how many times I get stopped in this rich neighborhood on my way to work," or "Here are the scars on my body from the bullets fired by cops."

These stories really changed the tenor of the discussion inside our union. It was no longer, "Why are we talking about this issue?"

So we structured our workshops to center on these stories—but also to include brainstorming for action. Members facilitated workshops across the local, beginning with the executive board itself, then at our annual Member Action Team conference, then on local campuses.

Meanwhile we reconvened an Immigration Committee that's been active on and off for over a decade. The two committees have begun to work together on new local-wide workshops and to demand sanctuary campuses, asking the university to refuse to collaborate with ICE to target undocumented immigrants.

Swinging into Action

Besides member education, our union has been building community ties by participating in labor contingents at marches and joining coalition campaigns for racial justice.

Alongside other unions and community groups we helped push the Alameda County district attorney to drop charges against 14 leaders in the Black Lives Matter movement, after they stopped a Bay Area Rapid Transit train in a Black Friday protest. This district attorney had been backed by labor—but we joined leaders from many unions to sit in at her office. Weeks later, the charges were dropped.

Another campaign is in Richmond, California, where UC Berkeley plans to develop a new campus. We helped form the labor-community coalition Raise Up Richmond to fight for a community benefits agreement, where a developer makes specific commitments before getting permission to build.

We're asking UC Berkeley to commit to hire and train disadvantaged local residents, which would create jobs for many low-income African Americans and other people of color who live near the site. We're also asking for a "fair-chance" policy to ensure that no applicant is denied a job simply because of a prior criminal conviction.

Since Trump's election, members have joined local coalitions for sanctuary campuses. Our union worked with the Students Association and other campus unions to draft expansive sanctuary demands, asking the UC president, chancellors, and CEOs to take steps not only to protect immigrant workers and students but also to prevent police violence and sexual violence on campus and not to cooperate with any Muslim registry. To back these demands we have so far held a dozen delegations simultaneously at all our campuses and hospitals.

We've also joined with other Bay Area unions, worker centers, and community organizations in a rapid-response network called Bay Resistance. This network has already generated big turnout for protests against the president's anti-immigrant executive order, Cabinet nominees, and ICE raids. Locally it's a way for our union to get more members plugged in.

SEEK OUT EXAMPLES

As we prepared to introduce racial justice demands into our bargaining, the three of us set out to learn from other California unions' efforts. We interviewed folks at UNITE HERE Local 2, at AFSCME Council 36, and at Jobs with Justice.

Local 2 has seen a steady erosion of jobs for African Americans in its hotels, while gentrification is forcing African American workers out of the community. To begin to address this crisis, a decade ago the union won language to increase hiring of African American workers in San Francisco hotels. More recently, the local has helped create a

nonprofit called Equality and Inclusion in Hospitality, Inc., that recruits, trains, and places workers of color from ballparks into higher-paid hotel jobs.

Meanwhile in Los Angeles, a coalition of unions in 2014 won a contract requiring the city to hire 5,000 new workers and target these job opportunities to underrepresented communities, often communities of color.

Community organizations got involved in formulating the campaign demands, which included pushing the city to raise money for city services by renegotiating investment-banking fees and reducing tax-dodging in commercial real estate. L.A. eventually agreed to create a commission to find ways to increase revenue.

A third inspiration was the agreement won by an alliance including Jobs with Justice San Francisco, the National Union of Healthcare Workers, and the California Nurses. They forced Sutter Health, as a condition of getting city approval to build a new hospital, to agree to hire at least 40 percent of its entry-level employees through a local community workforce program.

In each case, community and civil rights groups provided crucial leadership, pushing the unions to make racial justice a priority.

MAKE DEMANDS

Our joint bargaining team for the two contracts is made up of 21 hospital and campus workers. We surveyed members for three months and met several times as a team to draft and finalize our proposals.

In February 2017 we were ready to present our demands. At every UC hospital and campus, delegations of 10-100 members showed up unannounced to present our opening proposals to the local CEOs and chancellors.

Besides ending outsourcing, improving job security, protecting benefits, and increasing wages, we're proposing to create local-hire and training programs for disadvantaged workers and to ensure that UC follows "fair-chance" hiring procedures.

We're also proposing to expand our existing immigrant rights language. In a past contract campaign we won nondiscrimination provisions that restrict UC's ability to use government-initiated immigration-document reverification against members. Now we're demanding that UC make stronger commitments not to collaborate with immigration enforcement.

Our table is set. Next we wage an escalating campaign, driven by the hundreds of union activists across the state who participate in our Member Action Teams. Each MAT leader checks in regularly with a group of co-workers to involve them in actions, and the MATs meet together regularly to plan and debrief recruitment efforts.

When we talk to co-workers about the racial justice demands, we're connecting them to a bigger picture—the new threats to our communities and national right-wing efforts to divide and destroy our labor movement.

We're also talking to other unions and other organizations resisting the Trump administration to share examples of what we're trying to do. It's difficult for any single union to win and defend racial justice provisions alone. To establish pattern standards on these issues will take many unions pursuing the same demands.

Luster Howard, a truck driver at the Lawrence Berkley National Laboratory, and Maricruz Manzanarez, a senior custodian at UC Berkeley, are members of the AFSCME 3299 bargaining team. Seth Patel is the local's lead negotiator.

UNIONS ALLYING WITH COMMUNITY RACIAL JUSTICE FIGHTS

For examples of unions allying with racial justice fights in their communities, see:

[Chicago Teachers and Black Lives Matter Activists Partner to Build a Bigger Movement](#)

[Future Fighters Go to the Mat for Black Lives](#) (Young members of Service Employees Healthcare Illinois-Indiana are working both inside the union and in their communities.)

Scaffolded Resources for White Ally Groups

Linked from: <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/antiracismresources/antiracism>

Located at:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PrAq4iBNb4nVlcTsLcNIW8zjaQXBLkWayL8EaPlh0bc/preview?fbclid=IwAR1jNSD e9FftmbVTibt75cB0Rr_nvFpsitLGMp2IREux6WlczKV500X3IHg&pru=AAABcp6aoew*glcrg1J8mnVGpEPF6vgIfw

This is a working document for scaffolding anti-racism resources. The goal is to facilitate growth for white folks to become allies, and eventually accomplices for anti-racist work. These resources have been ordered in an attempt to make them more accessible. We will continue to add resources. UPDATED 06/12/20

Looking for immediate action steps? Click here: [Resources for Accountability and Actions for Black Lives](#)

Please note: if you wish to compensate us for this work, please donate to one of the following organizations: [Unicorn Riot](#) or [The Okra Project](#), or [Project Motherpath](#).* After you're done, send us a screenshot of the receipt if you'd like - scaffoldedantiracismresources@gmail.com

Documents containing resources used in this list:

[Anti-racism Resources for White People](#) (Sarah Sophie Flicker, Alyssa Klein - May 2020)

[Summary of the Stages of Identity Development](#) -- this document includes white identity development models, as well as models for people of color

[A Race Is a Nice Thing to Have](#) - provides the framework for white identity development (Janet E. Helms)

A link to this document was shared on June 11, 2020 and was attached to the image below. This image was not created by the authors of this scaffolded document and the creators of the image were not cited. This image can be found in the reintegration section of this document. An earlier partial attribution has been updated to include the necessary citation additions, which are listed here: [Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence](#) (2005). Adapted: [Ellen Tuzzolo](#) (2016); [Mary Julia Cooksey Cordero](#) (2019); [The Conscious Kid](#) (2020)



Stage of white identity development (Helms) and their corresponding beliefs/thoughts/actions	Resources *When purchasing books, please purchase directly from authors or local bookstores.	What to do next?
CONTACT "I don't see color." "Talking about race brings disunity." - Belief that racism is caused by talking about race. - Belief that you aren't racist if you don't purposely or consciously act in racist ways.	Activities: White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack (Peggy McIntosh) Podcasts: Whistling Vivaldi (NPR) Videos: "I'm Still Here," by Austin Channing Brown (Art of the Sermon) "White Awake" by Daniel Hill (FSP Chicago) Articles: "Walking While Blue" (Garnette Cadogan) Books:	Educating yourself is important -- utilize resources about racial inequality and biases. Reject the desire to ask Black folks, Indigineous folks or people of color (BIPOC) to explain racism for you. Instead, find resources created by BIPOC to help educate yourself, or offer to financially

How folks move from this stage: by being confronted with active racism or real-world experiences that highlight their whiteness.	1. Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria (Beverly Tatum) 2. I'm Still Here (Austin Channing Brown) 3. Whistling Vivaldi (Claude Steel) 4. White Awake (Daniel Hill)	compensate BIPOC folks who are educating you!
DISINTEGRATION • “I feel bad for being white.” • May feel like you’re stuck. How folks move from this stage: by participating in anti-racist work. *Big caution for this stage: be aware that sitting in guilt or shame might move us to the <i>reintegration</i> stage.	Activities: 1. Racial Bias Test (Harvard) -- this will help you understand what your biases might be Videos: 1. "Why Are White People So Bad at Talking About Race?" - short video summarizing the book by Robin DiAngelo	Do not let guilt (<i>white guilt</i>) or shame stop you from doing anti-racist work. Find a way to do the work of anti-racism. Some examples might include attending a training, joining an allies group, participating in a protest. Keep working to grow, instead of settling into shame, and ask folks how you can grow.
REINTEGRATION • “It’s not my fault I’m white.” • “I have a black friend/child/relative, etc.” • May notice yourself feeling defensive when talking about race. How do folks move past this stage? By combating these feelings of defensiveness, shame or superiority.	Activities: 1. Look over the graph below and reflect on your past, current thoughts/beliefs, and implications of these convictions.  [image source: Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence (2005). Adapted: Ellen Tuzzolo (2016); Mary Julia Cooksey Cordero (@jewelspewels) (2019); The Conscious Kid (2020)] Podcasts: 1. "Side Effects of White Women" (Small Doses with Amanda Seales)	Remember that moving forward is important. <i>It might be helpful to revisit some of the previous resources</i> to help remind you of why this work is important. Continue to find a way to participate. Some examples might include attending a training, joining an allies group, participating in a protest. Keep working to grow, instead of settling into shame.

	2. "Well Meaning White People" (Smartest Person in the Room) <i>Articles:</i> 3. "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" (Audre Lorde) 4. "When Feminism is White Supremacy in Heels" (Rachel Elizabeth Cargle) <i>Books:</i> 1. Me and White Supremacy by Layla F Saad <i>Videos:</i> 1. "Bloomberg and The Legacy of Stop-and-Frisk" (The Daily Show)	
PSEUDO-INDEPENDENCE • "How can I be white and anti-racist?" • Belief that privilege is not based on merit, but on bias & racism. • Rely on BIPOC to address racism. • Might affirm or seek to comfort the BIPOC who is addressing racism.	<i>Podcasts:</i> 1. "A Decade on Watching Black People Die" (Code Switch) 2. "How to Be an Antiracist" (Brené Brown + Ibram X. Kendi) <i>Books:</i> 1. So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo 2. Why I No Longer Talk to White People about Race by Reni Eddo-Loge 3. The Fire This Time by Jesmyn Ward <i>Documentary:</i> 1. 13th (Ava DuVernay) <i>Poem</i> 1. White Privilege (Kyla Lacey) <i>Videos</i> 1. How Can We Win (David Jones)	Begin having difficult conversations with white friends and family about racism and inequality. Begin to think about how you might use your privilege to support anti-racist work.
IMMERSION • Begins to work against systems of oppression, rather than seeing racism as individual actions. • Is able to embrace their own white identity & what their whiteness means, while also working alongside BIPOC • Works actively to be anti-racist.	<i>Activities:</i> <u>Reflective Journal Prompts</u> a. Think about the country that you live in. What are some of the national racial stereotypes--spoken and unspoken, historic and modern--associated with Black women? Black men? b. How do you see colorism at work in this country? How do you see colorism at work in your own prejudicial thoughts? c. How have you expected Black women to serve or soothe you? d. How have you reacted in the presence of Black women who are unapologetic in their confidence, self-expression, boundaries, and refusal to submit to the white gaze?	Complete the journal prompts and consider completing some of the action items laid out in these resources!

	<i>Podcasts:</i> 1. Kaepernick (Still Processing) 2. White Lies (NPR) <i>Articles:</i> 1. "The Case for Reparations" (Ta-Nehisi Coates) 2. "Why Seeing Yourself Represented on Screen Is So Important" (Kimberley Lawson) 3. 75 Things White People Can Do for Racial Justice 4. Resources for White People to Learn and Talk About Race and Racism <i>Books:</i> 1. The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander 2. How to be An Antiracist by Ibram Kendi 3. The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin <i>Video:</i> 1. 5 Tips for Being an Ally <i>Movies:</i> 1. The New Negro	
AUTONOMY • Embodied anti-racism: being willing to step in the way of racism when possible, engage in protests • Has done the work to recognize their own identity, so that they can effectively be anti-racist. • Recognizes that growth is continual, and they might need to revisit previous stages.	<i>Activities:</i> Answer these questions (written by Nii Addo Abrahams, M.A., M. Div. / Twitter & Instagram @ nickyflash) • Does your solidarity last longer than a news cycle? • Does your solidarity make you lose sleep at night? • Does your solidarity put you in danger? • Does your solidarity cost you relationships? • Does your solidarity take away time from other things you could be doing? • Does your solidarity change the way you spend your money? • Does your solidarity make you a disruptive presence in white spaces? • Does your solidarity challenge your country's values? • Does your solidarity make you think you're not racist? • Does your solidarity change how you read your Bible? • Does your solidarity change how you preach? • Does your solidarity happen when no one is looking? • Does your solidarity ever cause you to speak out when no one wants to listen? • Does your solidarity ever cause you to shut up when you want to say something?	

	• Does your solidarity change the way you vote? • Does your solidarity cause you to denounce our current president? • Does your solidarity include cis-het Black women? • Does your solidarity include Black queer and trans folks? • Does your solidarity make you suspicious of predominantly white institutions? • Does your solidarity cause you to believe in costly reparations? • Does your solidarity assuage your white guilt? • Does your solidarity have room for Black rage? <i>Online resources:</i> Racial Equity Tools <i>Book:</i> The End of Policing (Alex Vitale)	
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Social media accounts to follow in any stage:

Instagram: @wokebrownfem @nowhitesaviours @theimtireproject @rachel.cargle @advancementproject @britthawthorne @indyamoore @wearyourvoice @ckyourprivilege @alokvmenon @theunapologeticallybrownseries @austinchanning @theconsciouskid @antiracismctr @_nickyflash_ @heyqueenyoucute @brandonkgood	Twitter: @clintsmithIII @keeangayamahtta @Drlbram @MsPackyetti @JBouie @thearmchaircom @RevJacquiLewis @drchanequa @ava @YNPierce @esglade @jemelehill @_nickyflash_ @nhannahjones @professorcrunk @divafeminist	
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For those who want to be a better anti-racist in thier faith traditions

Christian resources:

[The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism](#) (Jemar Tisby)
[Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the U.S.](#) (Lenny Duncan)
[Disunity in Christ](#) (Christena Cleveland)
[The Cross and the Lynching Tree](#) (James Cone)
[Reconciliation Blues](#) (Edward Gilbreath)

[*Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*](#) (Michael Eric Dyson)
[*Trouble I've Seen*](#) (Drew G. I. Hart)
[*I Bring the Voices of My People: A Womanist Vision for Racial Reconciliation*](#) (Chanequa Walker-Barnes)
[*Dear White Christians*](#) (Jennifer Harvey)
[*Divided by Faith*](#) (Michael Emerson and Christian Smith)

***We are thankful for all of you who have shared links from your faith traditions. The shared links below have been suggested for addition.**

Jewish resources:

[Jewish Racial Justice Resources](#)

Islamic resources:

[Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative](#)

[Race & Racism](#) (Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative)

[Anti-Racism Guide for White Muslims](#)

Buddhist resources:

[Radical Dharma](#)

[Angel Kyodo Williams](#)

[Lama Rod Owens](#)

[Ruth King](#)

If you'd prefer to read a novel:

1. Angie Thomas's [The Hate You Give](#)
2. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's [Americanah](#)
3. Yaa Gyasi's [Homegoing](#)
4. Toni Morrison's [Beloved](#)
5. James Baldwin's [Go Tell It On the Mountain](#)

Podcast recommendations:

1. [White Lies](#) by NPR
2. [The 1619 Project](#) by the New York Times
3. [Uncivil](#) by Gimlet Media
4. [Pass the Mic](#) by The Witness Podcast Radio
5. [Seeing White](#) by Scene On Radio

For those in education:

1. [Anti-Racist Educator Self-Questionnaire and Rubric](#)
2. [Anti-Racist Student Self-Questionnaire](#)
3. ["Collectors, Nightlights, and Allies, Oh My!"](#) (Marisela Martinez-Cola, JD/PhD)

Accessible resources for the youth:

[Antiracist Baby](#) (Ibram X. Kendi)

[This Book is Antiracist](#) (Tiffany Jewell)

[Crossover Series](#) (Kwame Alexander)

Young Adult Literature:

[Dear Martin](#) by Nic Stone

[All American Boys](#) by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely

[I am Alfonso Jones](#) by Tony Medina

Middle grades;

[*A Good Kind of Trouble*](#) by Lisa Moore Ramée

[*Ghost Boys*](#) by Jewell Parker Rhodes

[*New Kid*](#) by Jerry Craft

Resources for parents:

[Raising White Kids](#) (Jen Harvey) -- article here: ['Raising White Kids' Author On How White Parents Can Talk About Race](#)

[Books to Teach White Children and Teens How to Undo Racism and White Supremacy](#)

Document created by:

Anna Stamborski, M. Div Candidate (2022)

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Case Studies

The Following Case Studies will be used to support group discussion.



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Equity Case Analysis Process

Step 1: Identify biases and inequities presented in the case

Step 2: Take stock of various perspectives, trying to remember the full variety of community members, including those who are involved directly and those who are involved at more of a distance.

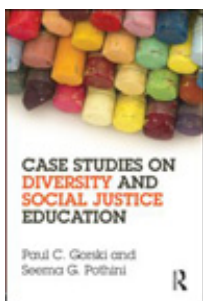
Step 3: Consider possible challenges and opportunities, paying special attention to biases and inequities and how the situation presents an opportunity for dialogue and positive change, not just for those immediately involved, but for the institution.

Step 4: Imagine equitable and just outcomes, remembering that *equity* requires a fair distribution of opportunity and access—a resolution of the bias or inequity, not just a resolution of interpersonal conflict.

Step 5: Brainstorm immediate-term responses, thinking specifically about how you might respond immediately in order to overcome challenges and maximize opportunities.

Step 6: Brainstorm longer-term policy and practice adjustments, keeping in mind that school and classroom conflict usually are symptoms of bigger structural inequities.

Step 7: Craft a plan of action, including both immediate-term and long-term components.



Designed by Paul C. Gorski (gorski@edchange.org) and Seema Pothini (sg1515@hotmail.com) for their book, ***Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education*** (Routledge, 2014). Check out the book for this more than 35 school- and classroom based case studies on issues like race, class, (dis)ability, gender, sexual orientation, and religion, along with a more detailed description of the case analysis process.

Summary: The equity literacy case analysis process encourages us to reflect deeply on school and classroom scenarios by considering them within a larger context of unequal access to privilege, power, and equity.

ARJ: Case Study – Staff Meeting Microaggression

After your equity audit, you are in a staff meeting with other UniServ Directors, your manager, and associate staff. The meeting includes a discussion about the organization's revamped hiring practice. The process will discontinue an interview with local leaders and the individual candidates to determine which candidate will "be a good fit". The equity audit indicated that the use of this interview to determine "fit" from a panel of pre-qualified candidates who have met all of the qualifications for hiring could allow bias into the selection process.

During the discussion at the staff meeting, it is clear that not everyone is comfortable with the local/cluster/region having a more limited say in who becomes their UD based on the new hiring practice. A UD says, "nobody who talks like that and looks like that would be able to work with my local leaders. They should have the final say in who they want for their UD".

Table Work: From your perspective (affinity group identification)

1. Identify the problem or problems posed by the comment
 - a. What does this scenario look like if you are an Actor?
 - b. What does this scenario look like if you are an Ally?
 - c. What does this scenario look like if you are an Accomplice?
2. Take stock of varying perspectives
 - a. Think about how this scenario affects you personally?
 - b. In turn, how does that inform your response?
 - c. Imagine how this scenario impacts you if you are BIPOC, a person who grew up in poverty, identify as non-binary, are transgender...
3. Consider possible challenges and opportunities
 - a. Think about how you would respond to this comment?
 - b. Think about how you could address this comment? Or could you?
4. Imagine equitable outcomes
 - a. Think about how this scenario would look if you were a white presenting person/BPOC person.
5. Brainstorm immediate-term response
6. Brainstorm longer-term policy and practice adjustments
7. Craft a plan of action
 - a. How could this be addressed through bargaining?
 - b. How could this be addressed through local leader training?
 - c. How can the affiliate be better prepared to address the impact of racist acts on staff members?

ARJ- Case Study: Staff Training

Your Affiliate has been participating in Anti-Racist training for the entire staff. Not all the staff think it is necessary to do this training because the majority of your membership is white. After a ½ day training dealing with micro-aggressions, you overhear two colleagues discussing it by the water cooler. One colleague states that “attending these trainings are a waste of time, and since it doesn’t impact their job directly, they shouldn’t have to attend”.

Table Work: From your perspective (affinity group identification)

1. Identify the problem or problems posed by the case
 - a. What does this scenario look like if you are an Actor?
 - b. What does this scenario look like if you are an Ally?
 - c. What does this scenario look like if you are an Accomplice?
2. Take stock of varying perspectives
 - a. Think about how this scenario affects you personally?
 - b. In turn, how does that inform your response?
 - c. Think about how this scenario would impact you if you are a BIPOC staff person?
3. Consider possible challenges and opportunities
 - a. Think about how you would represent this employee.
 - b. Think about how you could support/educate this employee? Or could you?
4. Imagine equitable outcomes (beyond the individual member)
5. Brainstorm immediate short-term response
6. Brainstorm longer-term policy and practice adjustments
7. Craft a plan of action
 - a. How could this be addressed through bargaining?
 - b. How could this be addressed through local leader training?
 - c. How can the affiliate be better prepared to address the impact of racist acts on staff members?

ARJ: Case Study- NBI: Safe Space for White Members

A group of conservative white members write an NBI asking for the State Affiliate to support creating safe spaces for “white members”. They have followed the appropriate procedures to create the NBI and have it presented at the State RA. Their rationale is that the state affiliate creates safe spaces for other groups (BIPOC, LGBTQIA, etc) so it is only equitable that they get a safe space as well. The NBI is in direct conflict with the values and mission of the State Affiliate.

Table Work: From your perspective (affinity group identification)

1. Identify the problem or problems posed by the case
 - a. What does this scenario look like if you are an Actor?
 - b. What does this scenario look like if you are an Ally?
 - c. What does this scenario look like if you are an Accomplice?
2. Take stock of varying perspectives
 - a. Think about how this scenario affects you personally?
 - b. In turn, how does that inform your response?
 - c. Think about how this scenario would impact you if you are a BIPOC staff person?
3. Consider possible challenges and opportunities
 - a. Think about how you would represent this employee.
 - b. Think about how you could support/educate this employee? Or could you?
4. Imagine equitable outcomes (beyond the individual member)
5. Brainstorm immediate short-term response
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7. Craft a plan of action
 - a. How could this be addressed through bargaining?
 - b. How could this be addressed through local leader training?
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Fighting racism, battling burnout: causes of activist burnout in US racial justice activists

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Fighting racism, battling burnout: causes of activist burnout in US racial justice activists

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ABSTRACT

Social movement scholars have identified activist burnout – when the accumulation of stressors associated with activism become so overwhelming they compromise activists' persistence in their activism – as a threat to movement viability. This phenomenological study on the causes of burnout among racial justice activists in the United States was designed to bolster understandings of burnout and inform strategies for sustaining racial justice movements. Thirty racial justice activists who had experienced burnout were interviewed. They described four primary burnout causes: emotional-dispositional causes, structural causes, backlash causes, and in-movement causes. Implications for activist and movement sustainability are discussed.

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KEYWORDS Burnout; activism; racism; anti-racism; racial justice; social movements

Introduction

Racial justice activists in the United States face challenges that could deteriorate their abilities to remain engaged in their activism. Some are retaliatory, like the threat or reality of state violence in response to their activism (Davenport, Soule, and Armstrong 2011). Others are internal, related to activists' empathic tendencies (McDonald 1997) and understandings of the scope of systemic racism (Blaisdell 2016), which can render them susceptible to emotional exhaustion or hopelessness.

Although these and other challenges are not uncommon in the history of United States racial justice activism, President Trump's association with white supremacists (Mathis-Lilley 2017), racist policy initiatives (Huber 2016), and encouragement of violence against activists (Mickey, Levitsky, and Way 2017) may have exacerbated threats to the sustainability of racial justice activists. Add efforts by corporate and government interests to criminalize racial justice activism, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation's recent "crack-down" on what it called "Black Identity Extremists" (Beydoun and Hansford

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2017)), and the context of anti-racism activism in the United States becomes clearer. As racism grows more explicit and anti-racism progress recedes, activists may feel less protected than racism's perpetrators and less hopeful about the possibility of progress.

Although scholarship on the impact of these conditions for racial justice activists is thin (Szymanski 2012), a growing body of scholarship examines their impact for feminist (Bernal 2006), educational justice (Gorski and Chen 2015), and other activists. These studies suggest that over time these challenges can result in activist burnout (Plyler 2006; Cox 2011), a chronic condition in which activism-related stress becomes so overwhelming it debilitates activists' abilities to perform their activism effectively or to remain engaged in activism (Chen and Gorski 2015). The result can be devastating for activists, often forcing them out of movements to which they once dedicated their lives (Rettig 2006).

However, the impact does not end with individual activists. Social movement scholars have argued that activist burnout is among the most formidable barriers to sustaining social movements (Cox 2011; Pigni 2013). The lack of sustained leadership due to burnout can create fragmentation within movement organizations, impeding movement effectiveness (Plyler 2006). Burnout begets burnout. Pogrebin (1994) thusly characterized activist burnout as the deterioration of activists' emotional and physical health resulting in the deterioration of social movements.

Although scholars have studied activist burnout in other movements (Gomes 1992; Pines 1994; Gorski and Chen 2015), no published studies examine it among racial justice activists in the United States or elsewhere. This is a significant hole in activist burnout theory. It is hard to imagine a useful conceptualization of activist burnout in a United States context not informed by how it operates in racial justice movements. The present study, an examination of burnout among United States racial justice activists, is designed to strengthen conceptualizations of activist burnout by incorporating experiences of racial justice activists. Additionally, better understandings of activist burnout among racial justice activists can inform strategies to sustain racial justice activists and thus bolster the sustainability of racial justice movements.

In service to these purposes, thirty racial justice activists in the United States who have suffered activist burnout were interviewed. Of most interest was how they characterized the causes of their burnout. Through a phenomenological analysis of semi-structured interviews, this study explored the question: How do racial justice activists in the United States who have experienced activist burnout describe the conditions that caused their burnout?

In this study, and consistent with how scholars framed activism in previous activist burnout scholarship (Pines 1994; Chen and Gorski 2015), racial justice activists are people who identify racial justice activism as their central life

passion. Following Szymanski's (2012) research on racial justice engagement, activism refers to purposeful action to cultivate social or political change. This does not mean racial justice activism was each participant's source of employment. Some worked in activist organizations. Others worked in non-activist jobs but still identified activism as their central life commitment.

Literature review

The present study is the first to document causes of activist burnout among racial justice activists. It is rooted theoretically in activist burnout theory as it currently stands, built around studies of other movements. It is also informed by studies on activism engagement among racial justice activists. Following a synthesis of conceptualizations of activist burnout, the literature on causes of activist burnout is synthesized. Research on the experiences of racial justice activists is incorporated into this synthesis to bridge activist burnout theory with scholarship on racial justice activists that attends more implicitly to burnout.

Conceptualizing activist burnout

Freudenberger (1974) pioneered the study of vocational burnout, wherein people once passionate about their work grow exhausted, cynical, and detached from it. Scholars have modified conceptualizations of vocational burnout to document burnout among environmental (Kovan and Dirkx 2003), feminist (Bernal 2006), and social justice education activists (Gorski and Chen 2015). These scholars documented characteristics of social justice activists that distinguish causes of their burnout from vocational burnout (Rettig 2006; Bunnage 2014), leading to the theorization of what came to be called activist burnout (Cox 2011; Chen and Gorski 2015).

For example, unlike people in most vocations, social justice activists are susceptible to state violence in response to their activism (Jones 2007; Cox 2011). Also, according to Maslach and Gomes (2006), activists' emotional connections to social causes elevate their susceptibility to burnout. The nature of activism, they explained, requires activists to sustain deep awareness of structural oppressions larger society is "unable or unwilling to face" (43). Shouldering this burden over time causes many racial justice activists to put unreasonable pressure on themselves, not just to respond to individual suffering, but to create massive structural change. This can lead to chronic frustration, exhaustion, and feelings of isolation (González 2015). For example, racial justice activists carry the burden of understanding the scope and impact, not just of interpersonal bias, but also of structural racism (Eichstedt 2001). Complicating matters, many racial justice activists of colour are targets of the injustice against which they act (Steinfeldt et al. 2012). They carry the burden of

structural understanding on top of the challenge of coping with the grind of racism in their own lives, often referred to as racial battle fatigue (Smith 2004; Amos 2015). Specifically for activists of colour, research has shown their engagement in racial justice activism often is directly associated with the accumulative trauma of the racial battle fatigue they experience; those who perceive the most traumatic accumulative experiences with racism are most likely to become activists (Szymanski 2012; Talcott 2014). This makes their context unique when compared with other contexts in which burnout is heavily studied, such as in human services professionals.

Certainly, human services professionals like social workers – common subjects of vocational burnout scholarship – can experience stressful pressures to address individual or community suffering. However, research indicates their primary sources of burnout revolve not around these pressures, but around issues like job autonomy, workload, lack of organizational funding, and workplace personnel shortages (Bakker and Costa 2014; McFadden, Campbell, and Taylor 2014). No study has identified these conditions as common causes of activist burnout.

Causes of activist burnout

Causes of activist burnout have been theorized around three themes: (1) internal causes related to activists' unique characteristics, (2) external causes related to individuals' and institutions' hostility towards activists' causes, and (3) in-movement causes related to how activists treat one another. Although burnout has not been studied in racial justice activists, scholarship on racial justice activists' dispositions and motivations suggests that many conditions underlying common causes of activist burnout in other movements exist in racial justice movements. In this section, I synthesize scholarship on causes of activist burnout in other movements, but also bridge these causes with related conditions observed within racial justice movements.

Internal causes

Activists are driven by deep senses of morality and strong emotional connections to causes (Goodwin 1997; Jasper 1998). They expend emotional labour, which Taylor and Rupp (2002) characterized as "channeling, legitimating, and managing one's own and others' emotions and expression of emotions" (142). Caring deeply about a cause presses many activists into activism (Kovan and Dirkx 2003). Their intense commitment and resulting emotional labour expenditures make them uniquely susceptible to emotional exhaustion and overwork, causes of burnout (Pines 1994; Chen and Gorski 2015).

Intertwined with intense levels of passion and commitment are activists' deep understandings of structural oppression (Lowan-Trudeau 2016). As

Kovan and Dirkx (2003) explained based on their study of environmental movements, activists embrace “consciousness in an unconscious world” (107), determined to redress conditions others refuse to acknowledge. Based on their study of animal rights activists in Sweden, Jacobsson and Lindblom (2013) found that participants recognized and internalized individual instances of violence and the massive accumulation of violence against animals, hastening emotional exhaustion.

The combination of structural awareness and intense commitments leads activists to apply immense pressure on themselves to produce significant change (Rodgers 2010). As a result, they often work themselves to exhaustion (Bernal 2006). They feel guilty about taking a break or experiencing joy while others are suffering (Effler 2010; Norwood 2013). As activists become more entrenched in their activism and less attentive to individual and collective well-being, the threat of burnout intensifies (Gorski 2015).

Although these conditions in racial justice activists have not been linked empirically to burnout, they are addressed in racial justice scholarship. Racial justice activists tend to have a structural orientation to racism, understanding its scope beyond interpersonal tensions (Eichstedt 2001). On average, they have deep senses of personal responsibility to eliminate structural racism (Warren 2010; Case 2012). In fact, studies show that activists of colour who have the deepest insights about structural racism based on their own experiences of racism are most likely to become anti-racist activists (Talcott 2014; Szymanski and Lewis 2015). As González (2015) explained based on her observations of the organization, United Coalition for Racial Justice, the combination of structural understanding and responsibility leads many racial justice activists to work themselves “until their bodies cave in” (16).

External causes

Activists can become targets of violence in response to their activism. They have been subject to police violence, harassment, and character assassination (Barry and Dordević 2007; Jones 2007). An experience of violence can contribute to activist burnout; however, the continuous threat of violence also can cause the emotional and physical exhaustion that precede burnout (Cox 2011). Although studies have not attached this threat among racial justice activists to burnout, studies have documented how racial justice activists often are targets of physical violence (Jacobs and Taylor 2011; Steinfeldt et al. 2012), including police violence (Davenport, Soule, and Armstrong 2011).

Notably, these threats are not equally distributed. Marginalized-identity activists are targeted at higher rates than privileged-identity activists (Bernal 2006; Norwood 2013), a condition that has been documented within the racial justice literature. For example, based on an analysis of

15,000 protests in the United States, Davenport, Soule, and Armstrong (2011) found that police officers interpreted racial justice activists of colour as more threatening than white activists. They responded with greater levels of arrest and physical violence at majority African-American protests than majority White protests.

In-movement causes

Marginalized-identity activists often are not safe from oppression even within their movements (Vaccaro and Mena 2011; Leondar-Wright 2014). Lorde (1988) explained based on her experience as a woman of colour collaborating with white feminists, “I was accused of ‘brutalizing’ the organizers by simply asking why Black women were absent” (74). This treatment can result in burnout as Gorski and Chen (2015) found in their study of educational justice activists. Nearly every activist of colour they interviewed attributed their burnout in part to racism from white activists.

Although it has not been associated specifically with burnout, studies have shown how racial justice activists of colour are subject to racism within racial justice movements, as well. Studies of white racial justice activists have revealed that they often become mired in guilt and shame involving their whiteness, constantly re-centering their needs for validation from activists of colour, draining organizational energy and disrupting movement progress (Mallett et al. 2008; Warren 2010). White activists tend to coopt racial justice movements and usurp organizational power from activists of colour (Jonsson 2016) so that activists of colour are forced to expend energy fending off these attempts (Jacobs and Taylor 2011). This can deepen their susceptibility to burnout.

Another in-movement burnout-exacerbating condition is a culture that quiets concerns about the toll activism can take on activists. Rodgers (2010) called this “the ubiquitous discourse of selflessness” wherein “displays of personal strain, sadness, or depression ... are viewed ... as unnecessary and self-indulgent” (279). Burnout is worn like a badge of honour (Pigni 2016); it is expected, a sign of commitment (Rodgers 2010). Hargons et al. (2017) pointed to similar conditions in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Notably, much of the popular activism literature spotlights internal burnout causes. Much of the popular discourse about burnout related to racial justice activism pushes “self-care” as the remedy (see Khan 2015; Ross 2017). However, research suggests in-movement causes may be more responsible for burnout than internal or external causes (Gomes 1992; Maslach and Gomes 2006; Plyler 2006). It is worth mentioning again that these findings were not based on research on burnout in racial justice movements; no such research existed prior to the current study. Only an analysis of burnout among racial justice activists can determine whether these patterns hold in racial justice movements.

Methods

Using a phenomenological approach, semi-structured interviews of thirty United States racial justice activists were analysed to answer, How do racial justice activists in the United States who have experienced burnout describe the conditions that caused their burnout? Phenomenological research is best suited to capturing the nature of a phenomenon as experienced by people who experience it (Finlay 2009). Creswell (2013) argued phenomenology is especially useful when examinations of a phenomenon can inform effective policy and practice – an important consideration given the author's interests in strengthening activist-sustaining practices in social justice movements.

Participants

Participants were selected based on three criteria. They (1) identified racial justice activism as their primary life's work, (2) engaged in their activism in the United States, and (3) had experienced activist burnout. Attempting to clarify the third criteria, recruitment messages defined activist burnout as

facing one or more of the following symptoms because of your racial justice activist work to an extent you were forced to disengage from activist activities at least temporarily: (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) physical exhaustion, or (c) cynicism or hopelessness.

Recruitment messages were emailed to the researcher's network of racial justice activists and posted on relevant social media sites. Potentially interested activists were instructed to email the researcher, who then re-inquired about the participation criteria. Eventually, thirty-eight people volunteered. Thirty were interviewed. They are summarized in [Table 1](#).

Procedure

Interviews of 60–90 minutes were audio-recorded in person or via telephone. A semi-structured interview protocol consisting of open-ended questions elicited participants' burnout stories. Items were informed by scholarship on activist burnout. Three social movement scholars provided feedback on the protocol. It was then piloted by five activists. Revisions reflected their feedback.

Following questions about the nature of participants' activism, they were asked about symptoms of their burnout (how burnout manifested in them), causes of their burnout, and their recovery from burnout. This study focused on how participants characterized causes of their burnout. Often causes and symptoms were discussed simultaneously even though the protocol included separate questions about each. All responses were considered viable data for this study. In some cases, follow-up interviews were requested to seek clarity on specific responses.

Table 1. Participant demographics.

Name	Race	Gender	Socioeconomic status	Years of activist experience	Primary focus of racial justice activism
Alejandro	Latino	Male	Middle class	13	Educational opportunity
Amy	White	Female	Middle class	25	American Indian Movement
Andrew	African-American	Male	Middle class	20	Youth justice
Anna	Latina	Female	Middle class	30	Chicanx justice
Barbara	African-American	Female	Working class	50	Foreign policy
Barry	African-American	Male	Working class	25	Community organizing in Black communities
Beverly	African-American	Female	Working class	30	Healthcare
Christopher	African-American	Male	Poor	15	Judicial system
Cristina	Latina	Female	Middle class	12	Black Lives Matter
Deborah	African-American	Female	Poor	15	Black Lives Matter
Felicia	Latina and Asian-American	Female	Middle class	31	Educational opportunity
Gerald	African-American	Male	Upper-middle class	18	Educational opportunity
Gregory	African-American	Male	Middle class	15	Police violence
Jason	White	Male	Middle class	20	Racial justice organizing in white communities
Jeff	White	Genderqueer	Middle class	51	Community education
Jonathan	African-American	Male	Middle class	16	Education
Kevin	African-American and Native-American	Male	Middle class	30	Food justice
Lila	Arab-American	Female	Poor	8	Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) access
Linda	Latina	Female	Middle class	59	Latinx educational rights
Lisa	White	Female	Middle class	16	Racial justice organizing in the Jewish community
Meredith	White	Female	Middle class	30	Racial justice in disability rights
Nicole	African-American	Female	Working class	18	Mass incarceration
Norman	Asian-American	Male	Middle class	18	Private schools
Patricia	African-American	Female	Middle class	26	Education system
Rochelle		Female	Middle class	24	Juvenile justice

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Name	Race	Gender	Socioeconomic status	Years of activist experience	Primary focus of racial justice activism
Rosa	African-American Latina	Female	Working class	15	Undocumented immigrant rights
Scott	White	Male	Working class	8	Housing
Sharon	African-American	Female	Middle class	41	Employment
Sofia	Latina and White	Female	Working class	11	Health disparities
Vince	White	Male	Working class	15	Police violence

Participants were offered the option of reading their transcripts and providing clarifications. Following this process, identifying information was wiped from the transcripts and pseudonyms were assigned.

Analysis

Following phenomenological coding practices, data were mined for what Creswell (2013) called significant statements. These included chunks of responses that illuminated causes of burnout related to participants’ racial justice activism. Significant statements were organized into big themes or clusters of meaning (Creswell 2013) such as “burnout associated with conflict within activist communities”. These clusters were reanalysed to uncover deeper intricacies in activists’ descriptions of their burnout. Data were organized into sub-clusters through several readings and reorganizations.

Findings

Participants’ burnout revolved around four cause themes: (1) emotional-dispositional, (2) backlash, (3) structural, and (4) in-movement. All participants attributed their burnout to conditions described by at least two of these categories. Most attributed it to at least three.

Emotional-dispositional causes

Of thirty participants, twenty-nine attributed their burnout to emotional-dispositional causes. They struggled with profound personal responsibility for eliminating racism, a deep emotional relationship to racial justice, and feelings of isolation.

Participants understood the scope of structural racism and felt responsible for eliminating it. Gerald (an African-American man in his forties) shared, “I

can't see myself not being involved in this work", whatever implications might come. Gregory (African-American man, forties), called his activism "a calling". Meredith (white woman, forties) explained, "There is something in me that can't let injustice live ... I was put here on this planet to do exactly what I'm doing." Their sense of responsibility led them to prioritize activism over other aspects of their lives, contributing to burnout.

Their sense of responsibility was related to intense emotional relationships with their activism. This made them susceptible to emotional exhaustion and cynicism regarding the slowness of change. It contributed to physical exhaustion from overworking. Like many participants, Barry (African-American man, forties) described how noticing conditions invisible to his peers since childhood intensified his emotional connection to anti-racism. For him these observations accumulated over time, affecting him "cognitively, physiologically" until his body shut down. Lisa (white woman, thirties) described how similar conditions affected her: "This work basically asks people to be in pain and it asks people to acknowledge the pain of others." These connections were elevated for participants of colour like Sofia (Latina and white, forties), who shared, "I grew up and lived and experienced [racism], so ... I have deep empathy for being on the other side of an oppression."

Both their sense of responsibility and emotional connections to racial justice informed participants' feelings of isolation in a society where their passion is mocked and minimized. Alejandro (Latino man, forties) attributed his burnout to "human isolation, having to be the one naming things ... carrying a lot of everybody's stuff". Participants lost friends. They watched relationships deteriorate with family members who did not understand their passion. Rochelle (African-American woman, thirties) shared, "I don't have a huge bank of people I can call on ... And even the people who love me the most, who don't want to see me suffer ... At times it is too much for them." Lila (Arab-American woman, forties) lamented, "I feel isolated. I feel like I've lost a lot of friends ... That ... physically hurts."

Participants responded by doubling down on their commitments, seeing their isolation as evidence that if they were not confronting racism, nobody would confront it. Nearly every participant linked these emotional-dispositional conditions to a tendency to drive themselves to exhaustion. Scott (white man, thirties) commented, "It doesn't matter how many things I do. There's always more that I didn't do ... And I think that in the aggregate, there is an unyielding pressure to participate in everything." Participants struggled to turn off the racial justice lens. Sofia shared,

The hardest thing for me is just to disconnect ... just going out and watching a movie with friends. I can't. I'm watching the movie and the whole time my head is going through all these things that are happening in the movie ... all these isms.

Many described similar examples of self-imposed martyrdom syndromes tied to their passion and emotional investment.

Taken together, these conditions made participants vulnerable to emotional exhaustion. They put immense pressure on themselves. They traded well-being for participation in activism, making them ripe for burnout. For participants of colour, these conditions overlapped with racial battle fatigue, the accumulative impact of experiencing racism (Smith 2004), further undermining their abilities to remain engaged and effective activists.

Backlash causes

Nineteen participants attributed their burnout to backlash from their activism. Often this backlash put their employment or bodies at risk.

Professional vulnerability was a significant stressor. Even if their job sites were not their primary activist sites, participants' commitment made it impossible to quiet their activism at work. Norman (Asian-American man, forties) shared that simply bringing up racism as a person of colour in his work place made him professionally vulnerable. Gregory described blowback from his supervisor for challenging racism at work: "I had difficult conversations with my supervisor. And then after trying to educate him, I became ... [in] his words 'an outlier, not a company man'". The inability to turn their activism off rendered many participants economically vulnerable and as a result, full of stress. Rosa (Latina woman, thirties) shared how professional vulnerability begot economic vulnerability:

I feel very vulnerable economically by choosing to do the work I do. There isn't a lot of free time. And if I'm doing [racial justice work] then I wouldn't necessarily expect to be paid to do everything that I need to do. And so I am keenly aware that if I operated in a different sector and did different work that I would do more than be able to live paycheck to paycheck.

Others carried the stress of knowing every job was "temporary" due to their outspokenness about racism.

Those whose work lives interacted more formally with their activism also felt professionally vulnerable and minimized. Alejandro, an anti-racism community educator, lamented, "When you hire somebody to fix the toilet, you trust them. But when you bring somebody to do [racial justice] work, there is no trust ... I remember being really exhausted having to talk about my credentials." Rosa shared, "The thing that causes the greatest challenge is not actually the work on the ground, but ... not hav[ing] that work be valued." Participants felt their activism was appreciated by some other activists but demonized by everyone else, contributing to emotional exhaustion and hopelessness.

Beyond professional and economic backlash, many participants felt physically vulnerable. Several attributed their burnout to physical "threats" and

“warnings” to cease their activism. Kevin (African-American and Native-American, thirties) shared,

It doesn’t matter whether you’re unarmed with your hands up. It doesn’t matter if your back’s turned. It doesn’t matter if you just plain didn’t hear somebody. It’s their policy to execute you. So there is always that pressure ... At this next rally, at this next protest, is someone going to kill you?

Over time these stressors drove many participants to the brink of burnout.

Structural causes

“Structural causes” revolved around what participants characterized as the impossible task of creating change against unbendable white supremacy. On top of this challenge, identified by 22 participants as a cause of their burnout, participants of color attributed their burnout to everyday experiences of racism outside their activism, a condition from which white participants were protected.

Speaking to how battling unbendable racism hastened his burnout, Gregory explained his activism as:

where the unstoppable force hits an immovable object so there’s just this massive neutralization that takes place. You feel like, the harder I go the harder the counter response is so ... it doesn’t matter ... what you try to do, there’s still going to be ... rac[ism].

Speaking to the accumulative toll of this battle, he continued, “It’s a mental and emotional exercise. It gets so heavy you just want to say, ‘Today I’m not going to engage.’”

Several participants felt hopeless recognizing, in Nicole’s (African-American woman, forties) words, that the “power structure” comprises people intent on protecting white supremacy. They feign interest in racial harmony, but only without racial justice, solidifying their “coalitions of power”. Sofia grew exhausted battling the dominant discourse that paints white people as victims. “That’s bullshit to me”, she said. This structural resistance slows the pace of change. Participants understood the implications of this slowness. It weighed on their emotional well-being.

Equally impactful were endless interactions during their activism with white people who refused to acknowledge racism. Jonathan (African-American man, forties) described exhaustion he felt having “the same damn conversation over and over and over again” with white people who denied racism’s existence. Several referred to the “All Lives Matter” movement – a response by white people intent on minimizing anti-Black racism (Carney 2016) – as an example. Andrew (African-American man, forties) shared, “Those are ... the areas that ... provide the most fatigue. Having these conversations [about Black Lives Matter] over and over again where you’re justifying your perspective, and the knee-jerk resistance.”

Several participants specified a particularly disappointing cause of their burnout as “white liberals”. These were people – non-activists – participants identified as embracing a celebrating diversity orientation towards race, but who ultimately protected their privilege by balking at more serious considerations for racial justice. Vince (white man, thirties) explained, “The people who have been most difficult to deal with are [white] people who say that they’re liberal ...” Participants described “white liberals” derailing conversations about racism, lobbying activists to “soften” their anti-racism goals, and prioritizing their comfort over racial justice progress.

On top of these burnout sources, most participants of colour referred to everyday experiences with structural racism as contributing to their burnout. Unlike white participants, participants of colour coped with racial battle fatigue (Smith 2004), the accumulative impact of structural racism on their lives inside and outside activism. Although this study focused on burnout causes related to racial justice activism, participants of colour struggled to distinguish stressors created by structural racism in their everyday lives from stressors associated with their activism. They recounted many stories about this racism. Andrew shared,

I've been stopped on my street ... saving my neighbor who was choking ... The people who called the police saw me and know me ... They are literally my next-door neighbors. But they saw me giving our other next-door neighbor the Heimlich maneuver ... and they called the police.

This is an example of how white supremacy operates even in the context of racial justice activism, elevating the threat of burnout for activists of colour. Unfortunately, activist burnout theory has yet to account for this complexity.

In-movement causes

All thirty participants attributed their burnout to how activists treat one another. Many became worn down attempting to navigate activist communities in which in-fighting and ego clashes were commonplace. They entered racial justice movements to work with like-minded people, but found movements full of competition, not cooperation. Anna (Latina woman, thirties), shared,

The competition is ridiculous. And it's tiring. And it takes energy to deal with some of that. So we do have a lot of people in this town who stay away from working with community organizations for that very reason ... That has led to burnout.

Participants described competition related to who had “street cred”, who adopted the most radical language, and who withstood the most oppression. The result, according to Amy, was that “people who should be allies often-times were hurting each other ... That for me really led to this feeling of

almost being paralyzed". Lisa described the in-fighting as "devastating ... exhausting ... suffocating". Participants grew disillusioned watching fellow activists jockey for attention and undermining movement initiatives. Alejandro shared,

There was this activist who would always smile at me and undermine what I wanted to do. He was not even passive-aggressive, not even that veiled ... He had been at the [organization] for 32 years. He had a lot of power, but pretended not to have a lot of power. I was undermined by this white dude.

Barbara (African-American woman, sixties) similarly shared how her burnout resulted from activists "cutting each other off at the knees".

Particularly troubling, fourteen of twenty-two participants of colour attributed their burnout to racism they experienced from white racial justice activists. Unlike the general frustration with non-activist "white liberals", this source of burnout was related to fellow activists, white activists, many of whom also adopted a white liberal stance and impeded movement progress. Gerald shared, "I got burned from so-called white ... allies who were on board until it meant they needed to do self-reflection." In several cases, participants of colour expressed more intense exasperation describing treatment by white activists than any other source of burnout. Andrew described "being shut down consistently by ... well-intentioned, progressive, [white] people who think they are lovers of justice".

Similarly, several participants experienced sexism, heterosexism, and class bias from other activists, igniting burnout. Eight women participants described sexually harassment or assault by male activists. Felicia (Asian-American and Latina woman, thirties), described "sexual objectification" she experienced from male activists while Meredith was exhausted by "male dominance" in activist communities. Jeff (white genderqueer person, fifties) burned out working with a racial justice organization "because of their heterosexism, ableism, and sexism".

Overall, participants were drained of energy and hope knowing they were not safe from oppression and ego clashes within communities of activists. They entered movements hoping for meaningful collaboration. Once in movements, they often felt beaten down by how they were treated by other activists, leading to burnout.

Discussion

In some ways, activist burnout causes uncovered in this study supported existing understandings of burnout. Participants had emotional ties and deep commitments to racial justice (Jacobsson and Lindblom 2013; Chen and Gorski 2015), coped with in-fighting within activist communities (Barry and Dordević 2007), and they were injured by the threat or reality of retaliation

for activism (Cox 2011). As in studies of burnout among peace activists (Pines 1994), feminist activists (Bernal 2006), and educational justice activists (Gorski and Chen 2015), causes to which participants attributed their burnout could be categorized as internal, external, and in-movement causes.

In terms of big-level understandings of burnout causes, the findings complicate “external causes”. Participants attributed their burnout to emotional-dispositional causes, backlash causes, structural causes, and in-movement causes. Although “backlash causes” and “structural causes” both might be understood as external causes, participants characterized them differently. Backlash causes related more to cumulative stress as activism rendered participants physically, economically, or vocationally vulnerable. Participants associated structural causes with exhaustion and hopelessness regarding the tenuousness of racial justice movements and frustration over what they characterized as the impossibility of significant change in the face of structural racism. Their attribution of burnout to structural causes was closely connected with internal causes – what I renamed emotional-dispositional causes because it felt more descriptive – such as intense commitments to racial justice. They experienced emotional exhaustion due to these commitments and physical exhaustion when these commitments led them to work themselves to exhaustion. When that did not produce evidence of more justice, they experienced hopelessness and cynicism, completing the burnout recipe.

Furthermore, as suggested in theoretical work about activist burnout (Maslach and Gomes 2006; Plyler 2006), the findings support the often-positated but rarely empirically evidenced notion that the most impactful burnout causes revolve around how activists treat one another. Participants spoke about emotional-dispositional, backlash, and structural causes as though they were expected. They expected backlash. They recognized their propensities for working to exhaustion. These were predictable burnout sources.

On average, participants spoke most incredulously about in-movement burnout causes – in-fighting, undermining, and oppression among activists. This is not quantifiable using qualitative data, but traces of evidence can be observed in participants’ words. Gerald felt “blindsided” by how fellow activists treated him. Deborah, undermined by white activists who refused to take direction from activists of colour, shared, “Clearly there’s tons of freaking white people who don’t get it.” They expected resistance from structures of power, but their responses to fellow activists’ behaviour were more specific and personal, characterized by words like “narcissistic” and “passive-aggressive”. Participants expected – or desperately wanted – activist communities to be safe from the oppression they experienced elsewhere. They found oppression reproduced with great precision in their movements.

This finding is particularly important considering the popularity of “self-care” as a burnout remedy. Further study should examine whether this

individualistic approach to burnout might reflect the competitive, uncooperative conditions within movements to which many participants attributed their burnout. Some scholars and activists have advocated shifting from a self-care to a community-care burnout orientation. Referring to racial justice activists, González (2015) urged a shift from self-care to community-building and the cultivation of “collective strength, wisdom, and beauty” (16) among activists. It is not just a matter of activists attending to their individual needs, but rather of movement leaders attending to the activist community’s needs. It is not just about activists reflecting on their own martyr syndromes, but also about reflecting on how they and their organizations contribute to a martyr syndrome epidemic. The shift starts with examining cultures within racial justice activist spaces, attending to the threat of burnout as part of activism rather than as something activists pursue outside activism (Perry 2014), as Hargons et al. (2017) argued in relation to Black Lives Matter. Findings of this study add credence to these shifts.

The findings also add nuance to understandings about how burnout might manifest differently in marginalized-identity activists – in this case, racial justice activists of colour – than in dominant-identity activists. With few exceptions, activist burnout scholarship has been silent on this matter. Those exceptions involve studies of or commentaries on burnout among activists in which scholars briefly mentioned ways marginalized-identity activists contend with burnout-inducing conditions from which dominant-identity activists are protected (Barry and Dordević 2007; Vaccaro and Mena 2011). For example, Cox (2011) suggested that marginalized-identity activists are more likely to experience police violence and physical attacks, elevating their burnout risk. Studies confirm his assertion: racial justice activists of colour in the United States are more likely than white activists to face police violence (Steinfeldt et al. 2012).

Others are related to in-movement causes. Mirroring findings of the present study, Gorski and Chen (2015) found that education activists of colour often identified racism from white activists as among the biggest causes of their burnout. Other previous studies, although not linking it to burnout, have detailed ways white activists assert their whiteness within racial justice movements, harming activists of colour and weakening movements’ effectiveness (Jacobs and Taylor 2011; Case 2012). Future research should examine these dynamics and their relationship with burnout more centrally.

Another important finding complicating understandings of activist burnout was that many participants of colour attributed their burnout, not just to conditions related to their activism, but also to racial battle fatigue (Smith 2004; Amos 2015): the accumulative effect of racism people of colour experience in their everyday lives. Activist burnout theory, built on examinations of activists’ experiences during their activism, has not been framed to consider how activists’ lives outside their activism interact with

their activist lives, despite research showing that activist persistence is related to the extent to which activists understand their everyday lives as interrelated with their activist lives (Rettig 2006) and despite research showing a correlation between high levels of perceived experiences with racism and anti-racism engagement (Szymanski and Lewis 2015). Considering this reality, activist burnout theory must evolve to consider how burnout in racial justice activists of colour is informed more generally by racism's impact on their lives.

The present study focused on racial justice activists in the United States, so the findings are not directly applicable to activists in other regional contexts. However, the findings can inform movement leaders in other contexts about the kinds of conditions that may perpetuate burnout. It is worth noting again how fashionable it has become for bloggers and journalists to write about self-care as a cure for burnout (e.g. Adams 2013; Obear 2017) while only rarely addressing how activists treat one another or differentiating the experiences of activists of colour from white activists (e.g. Corvid 2017). In every context in which structural racism persists, movement leaders should attend to its implications within racial justice movements. Similarly, everywhere activists of colour are still subject to racism outside their activism, racial battle fatigue will impact their activism. Even if specific dynamics related to causes of activist burnout differ across regional contexts, these broader conditions will persist.

Conclusion

Although this study was the first to examine causes of activist burnout among racial justice activists, scholars who have studied burnout in other movements have described it as a formidable barrier to movement sustainability. With activist burnout theory still evolving, one purpose of this study was to complement understandings of burnout causes by examining them within racial justice activists. Findings uncovered patterns of burnout causes found in other social justice movements, but also complicated those patterns by distinguishing two types of external burnout causes: backlash causes and structural causes. Findings also advanced calls for evolving conceptualizations of activist burnout to consider ways it operates differently in activists of colour and white activists.

Some limitations should be noted. Although this study's sample size was substantial according to phenomenological research standards (Creswell 2013), it is not large enough to generalize racial justice activists' burnout. Further study could use quantitative methods to reach broader understandings of the scope of activist burnout and allow for comparisons by identity and other factors. Additionally, findings of this study should be understood as reflecting a moment in time. Although racism always is rampant in the

United States, President Trump's incitation of violence against racial justice activists may have informed some participants' characterizations of causes for their burnout.

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ARJ: Case Study: Use of Racial Slur

A white male teacher receives a letter of reprimand for referring to a student as the “n” word. They contacted their UniServ Director for representation. The teacher claims that he was working with a student on a math problem, but the student was having a hard time grasping the concept. The student began to get frustrated, and the teacher stated that they would come back and help them when they had taken a few minutes to try and work through the problem again. As the teacher walked away, the student said loudly, “it’s not my fault I can’t solve this problem, you suck as a teacher!”. The teacher muttered under his breath, “I can teach, you “n”s just can’t learn!”

Background:

- The member is a high school math teacher
- The school is located in a predominantly upper-middle class neighborhood
- The class is predominantly white, with only 3 BIPOC students
- The statement was overheard by the student involved as well as the three students sitting at his table.

Table Work: From your perspective (affinity group identification)

1. Identify the problem or problems posed by the case
 - a. What does this scenario look like if you are an Actor?
 - b. What does this scenario look like if you are an Ally?
 - c. What does this scenario look like if you are an Accomplice?
2. Take stock of varying perspectives
 - a. Think about how this scenario affects you personally?
 - b. In turn, how does that inform your response?
 - c. Think about how this scenario would impact you if you are a BIPOC staff person?
3. Consider possible challenges and opportunities
 - a. Think about how you would represent this employee.
 - b. Think about how you could support/educate this employee? Or could you?
4. Imagine equitable outcomes (beyond the individual member)
5. Brainstorm immediate short-term response
6. Brainstorm longer-term policy and practice adjustments
7. Craft a plan of action
 - a. How could this be addressed through bargaining?
 - b. How could this be addressed through local leader training?
 - c. How can the affiliate be better prepared to address the impact of racist acts on staff members?

Equity Case Analysis Process

Step 1: Identify biases and inequities presented in the case

Step 2: Take stock of various perspectives, trying to remember the full variety of community members, including those who are involved directly and those who are involved at more of a distance.

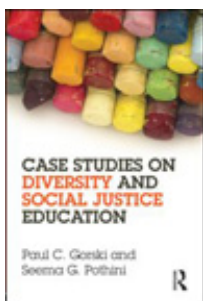
Step 3: Consider possible challenges and opportunities, paying special attention to biases and inequities and how the situation presents an opportunity for dialogue and positive change, not just for those immediately involved, but for the institution.

Step 4: Imagine equitable and just outcomes, remembering that *equity* requires a fair distribution of opportunity and access—a resolution of the bias or inequity, not just a resolution of interpersonal conflict.

Step 5: Brainstorm immediate-term responses, thinking specifically about how you might respond immediately in order to overcome challenges and maximize opportunities.

Step 6: Brainstorm longer-term policy and practice adjustments, keeping in mind that school and classroom conflict usually are symptoms of bigger structural inequities.

Step 7: Craft a plan of action, including both immediate-term and long-term components.



Designed by Paul C. Gorski (gorski@edchange.org) and Seema Pothini (sg1515@hotmail.com) for their book, ***Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education*** (Routledge, 2014). Check out the book for this more than 35 school- and classroom based case studies on issues like race, class, (dis)ability, gender, sexual orientation, and religion, along with a more detailed description of the case analysis process.

Summary: The equity literacy case analysis process encourages us to reflect deeply on school and classroom scenarios by considering them within a larger context of unequal access to privilege, power, and equity.