

Understanding & Dismantling Privilege

The official journal of the White Privilege Conference A program of the Matrix Center for the Advancement of Social Equity & Inclusion

“But, I Just Don’t See It!”: Making White Superiority Visible

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Abstract

This article describes a discussion tool that can be used to increase white people’s ability to recognize and interrupt behaviors associated with white privilege and internalized superiority. The discussion tool is in the form of a scenario, developed by a multiracial team of facilitators. The scenario describes a meeting taking place in a not-for-profit organization. Two white people in the meeting display common patterns of interaction that reinforce white privilege and its consequences. I offer an analysis of the behaviors and guidance on how facilitators can use the scenario to increase white participants’ ability to recognize and interrupt white superiority in themselves and other whites.

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Inspiration and Purpose

“First, though, I just want to say that I understand why this process is necessary, but if we could just wait for a minute. I want to understand, if there’s so little that the community has in terms of safe, healthy family community activities, then why would the community be so quick to criticize? I just don’t see it!”

The above quote is an adaptation from the discussion tool described in this article. The statement was made by a white volunteer in response to impending feedback from the community about outreach efforts she led at a service organization serving a community of color. The conversation continues with the leadership and staff working to decrease the volunteer’s defensiveness and move forward with the meeting agenda.

This discussion tool was inspired by Moody’s work on cognitive errors. Moody (2010) describes cognitive errors as the shortcuts “present as we gather and sort through information, interpret it, and reach decisions about candidates for jobs, tenure/promotion, and contract renewals” (p. 1). Moody goes on to illustrate 15 shortcuts that lead to “contaminated” decisions. They include: negative stereotypes, positive stereotypes, raising the bar, etc. Moody embeds those shortcuts into a set of dialogues, one of which illustrates how a predominantly white faculty group can convince itself to choose a white candidate over a candidate of color.

Based on Moody’s format, I created

a scenario that serves to highlight the way internalized white dominance functions as a form of cognitive error and, as such, plays out in destructive ways within community service organizations. For my purposes, as a white, female educator, the two specific issues I intend to highlight are the savior and superiority complexes. In this context, the “savior complex” refers to an attitude common among many white people that they have the responsibility and capacity to improve the life of a person or community of color. Usually, this entails the white person feeling that people of color are incapable of helping themselves (Tochluk, 2010).

The “superiority complex” refers to an attitude common among many white people that white people have better education, preparedness, and intelligence than people of color. White people who take on this complex believe, whether consciously or unconsciously, that their ideas are superior to those of a person or community of color. White people then act as though people of color are not able to determine their own needs (Tochluk, 2010).

My motivation to share this discussion tool was inspired by discussions with participants in workshops at the White Privilege Conference (WPC). For three years, I utilized this tool at the WPC as a stand-alone discussion prompt. Each year at the close of the session, participants spoke to me about its power and potential benefits. The conversations revealed that although many texts and resources are available that offer a solid analysis of what internalized superiority is and how it can manifest as

various types of micro-aggressions (Sue, et al., 2007; Trainor, 2005; Trepagnier, 2010), there is still a need to have concrete and explicit examples of how it arises within conversations and day-to-day situations. Since white people usually have a very difficult time recognizing the language and behaviors associated with white privilege and oppressive behaviors (Bonilla-Silva, 2009; DiAngelo, 2012; Lee, 2005; Picower, 2009; Thompson, 2003), a concrete scenario that captures typical patterns can help white people develop skills to identify when enactments of privilege are taking place. (Note: This scenario and the discussion it elicits can be used as a stand-alone activity. However, it was developed as part of a larger, more comprehensive curriculum that can be accessed via the Internet, if desired).²

Development of the Tool

A multiracial team of 15 reviewers supported the development of this scenario. First, a brainstorming dialogue took place with a colleague to identify common interaction patterns observed in local nonprofit organizations working for social justice. This white, female colleague was working for a Los Angeles-based

organization that placed many young, white, liberal activists in community organizations for a year-long internship. She had witnessed many interactions firsthand that demonstrated the unintentional, but very harmful, effects that a “do-gooder” could have on an organization led by a person of color if sufficient race consciousness had not been previously achieved on the part of a white intern. Simultaneously, this white colleague had been privy to countless venting sessions by leaders and staff members of the various organizations that revealed the damage to relationships that occurred and the resulting adverse effects on the organization’s work.

The ideas generated from the initial brainstorm were then translated into a five-person scenario (see Appendix A). Although fictional, the dialogue includes statements that speak to themes and patterns that are typical when white people join community efforts that serve people of color. Next, one of my primary conversational and feedback partners, an African American colleague, participated with me in critical conversations wherein we discussed the rationale and purposes for the exact details of the portrayal of the people of color in the scenario.³

² The tool presented in this article is part of the Witnessing Whiteness Workshop Series, a curriculum designed to deepen the learning for groups reading the book *Witnessing Whiteness* as part of a focused study. The scenario described in this paper is an exercise that appears in Workshop 2 and relates to information discussed in Chapter 2 of the book. Access to the pdf handouts of the scenario, workshop agenda, and facilitator’s notes are available for free download at: www.witnessingwhiteness.com. Once on the main page, select the Workshop Series page and follow the link for Workshop 2.1.

³ Aisha Blanchard-Young is a teacher who has been a colleague of mine since 1997 when we began teaching at the same elementary school. Our friendship and professional collaboration has deepened and expanded over time as we regularly discuss issues of educational equity, race, and other societal concerns. She continues to teach at the K-12 level and also serves as adjunct faculty at Mount St. Mary’s College. As each of us has divergent foci for our work, we do not present this work as a team.

Finally, a multiracial group of colleagues from various organizations reviewed the scene as part of a review of the comprehensive curriculum referred to above.⁴ Editing and revising occurred at each stage of the process. Most revisions of the materials constructed were related to the facilitator's notes (see Appendix B), as each subsequent reviewer provided insight into how best to frame the issues and their consequences for those who might implement the tool. Overall, the scenario was designed to be an initial step in a larger process.

The most widely discussed aspect of the scenario during the review process involved the relatively muted reaction from the characters of color to the white characters. For people of color and white people who have been working on issues of privilege for a long time, the attitudes of the white characters are easily identified as exasperating, insulting, and/or intolerable. Those of us who participated in the review process understand that the characters representing people of color in the scenario display a significant amount of restraint

However, she has been a primary collaborator on projects for many years.

⁴ Seven individuals (four white and three people of color) and two multiracial teams evaluated the entire Witnessing Whiteness Workshop Series, of which this scenario and its corresponding handouts are a part. One team, composed of the Racial Justice Team at the YWCA-Tulsa participated in multiple conference calls over the course of several months wherein the materials were reviewed and discussed intensively to ensure that they could be used with groups composed of only white people as well as with multiracial groups. Additional considerations included ensuring that the materials would be inclusive of people who are part of various target identity groups.

when responding to the white characters. We recognize the dialogue may portray realistic responses in some situations for some people, and on the other hand, the dialogue may feel inauthentic to those who would use a stronger voice. Many people of color do mute their voices strategically, but with "anger behind their eyeballs," to quote one colleague; others do not.

I also realize that our conversations about this issue may relate to Curry-Stevens's (2010) discussion of how a privilege-centered pedagogy can reproduce dominance. In this context, the choice to offer the voices of the characters of color in this way is a conscious choice that could unintentionally send the message to participants that all reactions and feedback from people of color should be given without emotion or angry tones. This could unwittingly be taken by white people as an excuse to dismiss people of color who react differently than those in the scenario. Clearly, this is not the intent. But, a facilitator using this scenario would need to raise this issue to ensure against that result.

With all the above in mind, and based on (1) our collective intent to avoid any reification of an "angry person of color" stereotype, and (2) our wish to disallow readers any room to become distracted by the representation of exasperated people of color reacting to white people, my primary partner in the construction of this scenario and I decided to leave this muted reaction in the scenario. This decision was rationalized in part by our goal to highlight the white people's behavior in a way that minimized the white tendency to blame difficult cross-

racial dynamics on the reactions of people of color.

Framework

Many approaches, models, and curricula exist to transform learning into effective action (see ECCW, 2012, as an example). In recognition of this, I want to clarify and acknowledge some concerns with this approach.

First, my efforts as a white woman to increase white people's awareness about how white privilege operates are conducted within the larger goal to take personal responsibility for dismantling racism and privilege and influence white people to (1) create an antiracist perspective and identity for themselves and (2) recognize the need for action in addition to consciousness-raising. This perspective lands me squarely in the camp of those who have determined that what needs to be done to counter Whiteness is to "use the insights and analyses identified by the examination of Whiteness as a social construction to rearticulate Whiteness into a more progressive, antiracist, White identity" (Manglitz, 2003, p. 124). This tool, then, can be considered just one small piece of an overall approach intended to help white people critically examine Whiteness and its effects on their attitudes and behavior so they can function more effectively and non-oppressively in multiracial contexts and people-of-color-led organizations that work for action and change.

Yet, there are concerns that arise whenever tools are created with a particular orientation toward supporting the

development of white people's awareness. This tool is designed to highlight typical patterns associated with well-intentioned white people who are not yet sufficiently aware of privilege to be nonoppressive, and are thus ineffective in their multiracial work environment. As these patterns are generally well understood by people of color, it is anticipated that in a multiracial setting the discussion is likely to be more instructive for white people than people of color (Miller & Donner, 2000).

Additionally, as the tool intentionally focuses on white people's behavior, the use of the tool may recenter the issues of white people in the conversation, making them the focus. This can be interpreted as a continuation of white dominance and privilege, as this approach may not equalize the learning or ensure that there is a focus on the needs of people of color in the room (Curry-Stevens, 2010). Other concerns involve the likelihood that the common patterns of white people (1) will injure people of color by making uninformed statements, and (2) will utilize the people of color in the room as the primary educators (Boler, 2004; Thompson, 2004). These dynamics could easily manifest when this tool is used in a multiracial setting. Understanding that these complications are present, I hope and trust that those who work together in dialogue spaces recognize that the overall goal is to undermine privilege and that a key element in that effort is helping those enacting privileged behavior to recognize it. Further discussion addressing these concerns is treated later in a section focused on preparing to use the scenario.

Lessons Learned During Application

At the time of this writing, I have used the scenario as a stand-alone discussion tool at the WPC for the past three years and with a dialogue group at a small, liberal arts college. I have learned three primary lessons through the implementation process in regard to the use of the scenario.

First, it is exceedingly hard for well-intentioned white people (those just coming to awareness of power and privilege issues) to identify the issues present in the scenario without first laying some groundwork. My first recognition of this came about when conducting a workshop at the WPC in 2010. The agenda for the workshop was styled after a presentation Moody offered at the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education (NCORE) in 2009 titled *Helping Colleagues Rise Above Unconscious Bias and Cognitive Shortcuts*.

My assumption was that the dynamics in my workshop would be similar to those in the NCORE workshop I attended, with some participants easily recognizing the enactments of internalized superiority and others unable to see them. As predicted, many participants did recognize problematic behavior on the part of the white characters, while some participants new to the discussion lacked significant insight into the dynamics. I also realized that the ability to notice and identify the instances of “savior” and “superiority complex” behavior was challenging if the participants had no prior context for those concepts and their consequences. In other words, some preparation at the start of the workshop is necessary in order for participants to truly

understand the way these problematic behaviors are linked with inner, psychological issues and how avoiding enacting those behaviors takes focused attention on the part of white people.

Having learned this lesson, the following year at the WPC in 2011, I provided a “Context and Terms” handout to participants prior to distributing the scenario (see Appendix C). This time, the group spent time discussing the concepts prior to reading the dialogue. The handout clarified what is meant by the following terms: *intent*, *impact*, *over-confidence*, *lack of confidence*, *savior complex*, and *superiority complex*.

I found that previewing the set of terms and what I mean by them prior to launching into the reading and discussion of the scenario was helpful. It allowed increased numbers of participants new to the concepts to identify the issues on their own and in small groups without needing as much feedback from the large group. In turn, the time previously taken up with participants trying to convince one another of racial realities was reduced. This allowed the discussion group to spend more time reflecting on personal experiences and brainstorming how to strategically interrupt enactments of internalized superiority. It also uncovered the need for white people to do racial identity work in order to truly understand the nuances of behaviors based in internalized superiority. By “racial identity work,” I am here referring to a focused investigation of how being a member of one’s particular race, in this case the white group, affects one’s acculturation,

thought patterns, sense of self, assumptions about life, etc.

The second lesson I learned is that the dialogue offered in this discussion tool is different from the one offered by Moody, beyond the topic and focus, in one very specific and important way. This scenario portrays a woman of color in a lead position in the meeting. I had failed to recognize the backlash that would arise, with participants blaming her character for poor leadership. I had not anticipated how the interwoven patterns of internalized superiority and internalized inferiority would surface. These patterns have resulted in the scene's organizational director—a woman of color—being harshly blamed for the way the meeting unfolds by both white participants and participants of color.

As the facilitator's notes (Appendix C) acknowledge, some measure of recognition of what her position requires and what leadership skills are needed may be valid. However, the level of blame directed against that character from both white and people-of-color participants in the WPC 2010 and WPC 2011 presentations seemed, to me, overly critical, misplaced, and used to justify defensiveness on the part of a white character. This led me to begin the WPC 2012 presentation differently.

In 2012, instead of simply asking participants to take note of what they noticed in the scene, I realized that I needed to focus participants' attention more concretely. Therefore, I requested that participants attempt to focus on locating issues related to enactments of white privilege and superiority (corresponding

with the terms previously presented). This helped to clarify the intent of the process and resulted in the most productive conversation yet while using the discussion tool.

The third lesson learned regards the context. At the WPC the context is rather formal. Clear intention is set through a workshop description, and all participants have at least some shared idea of why they are in the room together and what to expect (based on having chosen a particular workshop from among many options). Thus, a certain level of buy-in has already been generated through the general, published goals of the conference.

Using this discussion tool at my college campus in an informal, voluntary, faculty-initiated dialogue composed of community members (faculty, staff, and administration) responding to an email invitation from me to discuss "race and culture" was a very different experience.⁵

⁵ What we call "post-faculty assembly dialogues" on my campus have been ongoing at Mount St. Mary's College for a few years. They were initiated in the fall of 2009 by the members of a book group that read *Witnessing Whiteness* and recognized the need to keep the conversation alive on campus. The dialogues take place approximately five times per year and I invite any member of the faculty, staff, or administration who would like to attend. There are a handful of regular attendees, and each dialogue brings a set of newly interested participants. I have provided facilitation support throughout the three years. During the second year, an African American male staff member at the college offered his facilitation skills so that we could act as a multiracial team. Due to work and scheduling issues, he was unable to participate during the last academic year. I continue to strive to share facilitation with a person of color. However, in the meantime, the group has requested that I continue to support the process.

Although my campus dialogue is ongoing, it meets only sporadically and does not have a focused progression of topics or specified direction for advancement (per participant request). Those who attend generally do so with specific issues in mind and an overall desire to learn more about how to deal with race and culture on our campus.

When I brought this discussion tool to this college group (with prior agreement from regular attendees), the group became so engaged with the “Context and Terms” handout that the entire hour-and-a-half dialogue period was spent in discussion about the topics presented in the handout. Admittedly, the questioning and sharing offered what I considered to be a productive and fascinating discussion. However, the lesson learned is that when bringing concepts of intent vs. impact, white privilege, and superiority and savior complexes to a group of disparate dialogue participants who do not have a shared background in any of the ideas, one should expect to need significant time to build a base of knowledge to allow for a fruitful discussion of the scenario.

This section was intended to offer a narrative trajectory of how I came to conduct the workshop using the tool as I currently do. In the next section I will discuss a number of issues that need to be considered during the planning stages before implementation of the scenario.

Preparing to Implement the Scenario

There are a number of issues to consider before utilizing the scenario, including what types of group contexts

would be most appropriate and some guidelines regarding facilitation. Although this scenario portrays a discussion that takes place in a not-for-profit community setting, the usefulness of the tool is not limited to individuals who work in that context. The concepts are important for anyone committed to antiracist practice, and based on feedback from participants who have been part of the WPC workshops, this tool can be supportive for those working in the following areas: community organizing, education, social work, nursing, religious communities, social service and civic organizations, political activism, and public service, among others.

As stated above, achieving a lasting, transformative learning experience is more likely when there is an ongoing or extended opportunity to return to the ideas and concepts over time (Miller & Donner, 2000). As this scenario was originally designed to be used as part of a companion curriculum when reading the book, *Witnessing Whiteness* (Tochluk, 2010), I appreciate that perspective. And yet, this may not be possible in certain contexts. When faced with the predicament of limited engagement, I acknowledge that the situation is not optimal, but appreciate that any opportunity to raise these issues is worthwhile.

When it is possible to make decisions regarding the composition of the group of participants, an important question to ask involves whether the discussion should be conducted as a single-race (caucused) group or as a multiracial group. There are many issues to consider if

presented with a choice, with pros and cons on either side.

Multiracial groups are a more common format and are more readily accepted by most institutions. Multiracial groups offer the chance for cross-race communication, learning, and perspective sharing. The importance of this cannot be underestimated.

On the other hand, multiracial groups are also associated with risks. To restate just a few, people of color may end up feeling the burden of additional injury from racist statements made in the group (Curry-Stevens, 2010) and be used as educators for white participants (Thompson, 2004) without necessarily gaining as much from the discussion as the white participants (Curry-Stevens, 2010; Miller & Donner, 2000). Additionally, a focus on the white participants' needs and attempts to keep them engaged and learning through an empathetic approach that supports them to imagine a new way of being white (Manglitz, 2003), however effective, could be experienced as coddling, reinforcing privilege, and ignoring the urgency of the situation for those who want white people to make progress more quickly.

When the context allows for the possibility of having white people meet together to discuss this scenario without the presence of people of color, there can also be some benefits. An all-white space provides an opportunity for white people to teach each other about internalized superiority and discuss the deep, psychological issues that are at its root. They can do this without people of color needing

(1) to act as the educators in the room, or (2) to witness white people using possibly offensive language and/or frustrating defensive mechanisms as they come to grips with these issues.

Yet single-race groups also pose significant challenges. These challenges include difficult questions such as: Who is a member of the white group, and therefore, who gets to join the discussion? Will there be a group for people of color who want to gain access to the scenario, and who is part of that group? How will accountability be part of the process? Are there white people available with sufficient insight and skill to reliably lead the discussion? What is the legality of holding a meeting that could be considered exclusionary if there is no parallel process for people of color?

Personally, I do a lot of work in single-race groups. Members of an organization I have worked with for the past nine years meet as a white group in order to support the development of our antiracist identity and practice and influence other white people to do the same.⁶ We meet monthly and also host an annual institute for self-identifying white people.⁷ Through this work, I have had to struggle to understand my own position as regards the questions posed above. Having done so, I can also

⁶ AWARE-LA has constructed a seven-point explanatory description for why we meet in a white space. We created this for ourselves so we could better explain our efforts to others. The full text is available at: www.awarela.org.

⁷ The Unmasking Whiteness Summer Institute has been offered annually since 2009. Information about the event and contact information can be found at: www.awarela.org.

report that the majority of the workshops I facilitate outside of this organization are multiracial. The only time I have worked in single-race groups outside of this organization is when there has been a parallel group for people of color led by a facilitator who believes strongly in the value of single-race processes and its capacity for growth and healing for all parties concerned.

An article by DiAngelo and Flynn (2010) illustrates a range of dynamics that frequently arise when facilitating this scenario in a multiracial team. DiAngelo and Flynn also provide an insightful analysis of these dynamics and a process the authors use to navigate them.

In a separate set of articles, DiAngelo (2006, 2012) highlights patterns to watch for as regards white people using silence in cross-race dialogues in ways that can be oppressive. Although my experience with implementing this scenario is that it tends to engage a lot of conversation amongst all participants, an essential point raised by DiAngelo (2012) is the importance of clarifying that “safety” and “comfort” are not the same thing. She writes:

Indeed, many white people feel very uncomfortable in racial discussions, but this discomfort is actually a positive sign, for it indicates that the status quo (unnamed and unexamined racism) is being challenged. It is therefore critical that we feel uncomfortable and not confuse discomfort with danger. As for being judged ... feeling judged, while dismaying, should not be confused with safety. (p. 12)

It should be noted when utilizing this discussion tool with white people new to the concepts of internalized superiority that it is not constructive to strive to remain comfortable, particularly if entrenched and unconscious patterns are being brought to the surface and explored. Therefore, it is important that the facilitator be prepared to respond to a potential challenge regarding the issue of whether or not the environment is a “safe space.” DiAngelo (2012) continues by explaining that the request that the facilitator ensures a “safe space” obscures our history of privilege. Speaking as a white woman to white readers, she states:

The history of extensive and brutal violence perpetrated by whites; slavery, genocide, lynching, whipping, forced sterilization, and medical experimentation, to name a few, is trivialized when we claim we don't feel safe or are under attack when in the rare situation of merely talking about race with people of color. (p. 12)

These reminders can support us in balancing two important needs, offering an empathetic approach that engages white people in self-evaluation *and* offering a critical challenge to a privileged way of being that experiences comfort as the expected norm.

Overall, the ideas conveyed in this section are meant to support potential facilitators in thinking through the kind of environment that will be created when using the scenario. The next section outlines the step-by-step agenda used during my most

successful implementation of the discussion tool thus far.

Using the Scenario

The most successful agenda I have used thus far for implementing the scenario included an introduction covering several topics, a discussion of a set of terms, the reading of the scenario, small group discussion, and large group discussion. I will describe each of them and how much time was allocated within a 90-minute session as part of this section.

To begin, an invitation for participants to explain (1) why they chose to attend the workshop, and (2) what they hope to gain from it has been supportive. In a small group I invite all to share. When there is a large group, I invite participants to quickly share their responses to someone sitting next to them. Then I take a sampling of share-outs until we get a “flavor” of what is in the room. Time: 10 minutes.

When beginning any workshop as a white person fundamentally intending to influence other white people to develop an antiracist identity and practice, I always offer key points as an introduction. These include why I am invested in the work, and why I believe white people in general should be invested in the work. Antiracism and the disruption of white superiority are not taken up *for* other people. It is part of the work to liberate ourselves (white people) from unconscious participation in an oppressive system that creates divisions between people and undercuts cross-race community building and social justice efforts. Time: 10 minutes.

The review of the “Terms and Contexts” (see Appendix C) can be fairly brief if the participants have a working knowledge of white privilege and internalized superiority. However, time spent clarifying what is meant by these terms is a good investment so that a more productive conversation can take place later when analyzing the scenario. Generally, participants simply read each term and its description (either aloud or silently). Then, clarifying questions are invited and discussed. Anecdotal stories related to the ideas are asked to be held for later discussion. Time: 10 minutes.

As participants are invited to read the scenario silently, as stated earlier, I highlight the intended focus to locate incidences of white superiority behaviors. Additionally, I either distribute or project on a screen the following set of questions. Time: 10 minutes.

1. In what ways does this scenario resonate for you personally?
2. Have you ever been part of or witnessed a similar dynamic play out?
3. What did you notice about the exchange? Where is white superiority arising?
4. How might you respond if you were in this meeting?

Extra note paper can be distributed for participants to jot down ideas while reading.

Once individual, silent reading concludes, participants are asked to move

into small groups of four or five individuals to share their thoughts regarding the questions posed above. During this time, the facilitator can visit each group to get a sense of what is coming up for the various participants. This sharing time helps all people immediately use their voices and begin to clarify thoughts. Time: 10 minutes.

Moving into a large group for a whole group dialogue, the facilitator now takes a more active role supporting the participants in dissecting the scenario. First, the facilitator asks participants to focus on statements 1 through 6 of the scenario script and then tries to draw out the issues involved there. Using the Facilitator's Notes (Appendix B) as needed, the facilitator can ask some more directed questions (shown below) if the participants do not identify the issues on their own.

Once the main points in the first section are exposed, the facilitator asks participants to focus on statements 7 through 12 of the script and continues prompting discussion in the same way. Then, the facilitator asks participants to focus on statements 13 through 18 of the script and continues prompting discussion. Guiding questions the facilitator can use (not displayed on the screen) while moving through the three sections of dialogue include the following:

1. What stands out from this scene?
2. Where do you see defensiveness arising?

3. How might some of the exchanges betray a sense of superiority or a savior complex?
4. Where do you see someone's input or words being discounted?
5. What did you see in this scene that could have a negative impact?

This portion of the discussion is generally where most interpretative and corrective statements are offered by fellow participants and/or the facilitator. The more the participants in the room can support each other to arrive at a clear understanding of how white superiority behaviors are being enacted, the better. Time: 35 minutes.

Finally, a culminating conversation focused on the following two questions can offer direction for future movement.

1. What could be done to help stop this scene from playing out as it does?
2. What approaches/skills/qualities would help the white people avoid acting out of a "superiority" or "savior" complex?

Conducting this section as a brainstorm wherein notes are taken and then later distributed to the group may be valued by participants. Time: 10 minutes.

This particular agenda leaves approximately five minutes for a final wrap-up and evaluation. A quick check-out inviting participants to say just one word

that captures their thoughts or feelings as they finish the workshop can be revealing.

Concluding Thoughts

Participants approaching me following workshops regularly describe feeling that this discussion tool is a powerful approach to initiating conversation on very difficult topics. They report that it (1) allows white people to begin to understand concepts with a reduction in defensiveness, and (2) allows people of color to name what they experience without needing to speak specifically about a particular situation in an organization or community. This article offers this tool for use by readers in response to multiple requests from past participants who believed it would be useful for their work and social contexts. I sought to offer as complete an account as possible of the concerns to be considered and lessons learned thus far. And I do so in the belief that we are stronger when we support one another through sharing our insights and best practices. I hope this proves supportive to efforts in the field to raise white people's awareness and generate increased capacity and motivation for action to dismantle privilege.

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Appendix A

The Scenario

Meeting Participants

Kim: Asian American woman, director of programs with the organization for the past two years

Darron: African American man, volunteer with the organization for three years

Tracey: White woman, volunteer with the organization for seven months

Jose: Latino man, ad hoc volunteer, community member

Gloria: White woman, staff with the organization for the last two years

1 - Kim: Thank you all for coming. Now that we've had a chance to check in with each other for a few moments, I'd like to move to our agenda. Tonight's meeting is focused on our upcoming community event, the family film night. There's a lot that we need to do, so let's get started. One agenda item has to do with some community feedback.

2 - Darron: Yes, I've been hearing some people concerned about our planning process and decisions we've made regarding outreach.

3 - Tracey: Well, I, for one think we've been doing a really good job at bringing community voices in. I mean, Jose has been coming regularly and we've been really responsive to what he's had to say.

4 - Jose: I'm not the only important voice in the community though.

5 - Tracey: Of course, I know. But, I mean, we can only respond to issues that we hear.

6 - Darron: Well, that's just it. There are things that we're hearing. And, one of the things we're hearing is that we've missed quite a lot that we could have known because we didn't ask the community for their ideas way in advance.

7 - Tracey: I'm just not sure how productive it is to worry about making everyone happy. I've talked to a lot of people who are really excited about this event. I've been the one who took up responsibility for outreach, remember, and I think we're going to have a really successful event.

8 - Kim: The point of this meeting, though, Tracey is to hear what feedback is available so that we can do things better as we move forward. Darron has some things to share that we should listen to.

9 - Gloria: Yeah. It's really important to know what Darron's hearing. I mean if there's anything we can do better to get more people involved and comfortable with what we're doing, we've got to do it. I mean the people living in this community have so little to look forward to that it would be a shame for them to miss out on really great events because we didn't listen well enough.

10 - Kim: Darron, why don't you go ahead and share what you have heard.

11 - Tracey: First, though, I just want to say that I understand why this process is necessary, but if we could just wait for a minute. I want to understand, if there's so little that the community has in terms of safe, healthy family community activities,

then why would the community be so quick to criticize? I mean, shouldn't we really be spending our time continuing to get the word out instead of using our valuable time this way?

12 - Jose: The issue is not that there aren't good, fun things for people to do.

13 - Gloria: Let me clarify what I meant. I know the people who live around here have a lot of really rich cultural traditions. But, part of our job is to help offer things that aren't already part of their norm, you know, expanding awareness of what kinds of activities can support family and learning and all that. So, whatever we need to do in order to be more effective, it's really important. And, that starts today with hearing what Darron has to say.

14 - Kim: Tracey, I understand that you've been doing the outreach, and so I can understand why you'd be sensitive about what must feel like criticism. But, we haven't even heard what Darron has to say yet, and I really feel that listening to community members is at the heart of what makes this organization successful and valuable.

15 - Darron: Trust me on this, if we can't find more ways to bring community voices in to our planning process we are going to end up with a bad reputation and lose whatever energy we've got going.

16 - Jose: I think that's true. Although I've been part of the planning, that doesn't mean I speak for all parts of the community.

17 - Gloria: Besides, inviting the community to play a stronger role in our planning is also a way to help empower them. And that's really important too, since so many of them feel powerless in so many areas of their lives.

18 - Kim: Ok, so I think we've spent enough time on this right now. While I think the issue of empowerment is far more complicated that you just stated, Gloria, I think it's time for Darron to go ahead and tell us what he's heard. Darron, you're up.

END

Appendix B

Facilitator's Notes

Following Line 3 - Notice how quickly Tracey jumps to a defensive posture. A specific criticism hasn't even been suggested yet. But, Tracey is anticipating receiving difficult feedback and is trying to create a protective barrier against it at the start.

Following Line 4 - When Tracey names Jose as the way the group has been responsive, she puts him into a position of being the speaker of the community ... as though one person represents the whole.

Following Line 5 - She's right of course. But, hearing issues has a lot to do with our openness to receiving difficult messages. Also, there's a question around who is thinking about creating channels/systems for getting the feedback. Is it possible that better systems would be in place if someone more sensitive to the community were in charge? Does it seem that Tracey is likely to hear that message?

Following Line 7 - Notice that Tracey has only been part of the group for seven months and yet she did take up responsibility for outreach. She likely did that with really great intentions. ... But this exchange is demonstrating that there is more she needs to learn about doing this work effectively. This aspect of the meeting is intended to help her learn new skills, but she is highly resistant and her defensiveness leads her to dismiss voices from the community, which could be the very ones she needs for her own development.

Following Line 8 - It is fair to say that Tracey was allowed to take up a big job and perhaps needed some more training before she took up a leadership position. That responsibility would rest with the director. Yet, as we are seeing, the director is trying to offer a learning opportunity here and is being met with resistance. This can be a challenging dynamic when an organization wants to make use of volunteer efforts, but the need for skills building for those volunteers is also required and may try the capacity of the organization.

Following Line 9 - Notice how Gloria is trying to bring Tracey back to the point of the agenda item and break through her defensiveness. Yet, the language she uses to describe the community would likely be highly offensive to anyone from the community itself. It has a strong "savior complex" flavor to it.

Following Line 11 - Here, Tracey is picking up on the point that Gloria has made—which results in this conversation being really guided and led by the two white women—as she continues to deflect the critiques that are about to come.

Following Line 12 - Notice how Jose's comments are brief, but in defense of his community. It is likely that this conversation is raising a lot of internal feelings regarding how his community is being perceived and treated by the two white women.

Following Line 13 - Again, there is something positive about how Gloria is responding, and yet, her approach betrays a sense of superiority that would be difficult for many people to listen to.

Following Line 14 - Here we can see Kim taking a fairly soft approach to Tracey, ignoring Gloria's comments for the time being. We can imagine what type of frustration Kim might have if this were a pattern.

Following Line 17 - Here again we notice Gloria's framework for seeing the community betrays a sense of paternalism that likely plays out in many ways. She's trying to help ... but doing some serious damage at the very same time.

Following Line 18 - So, after all this, we are just now getting to the heart of the matter ... maybe. Kim is in a challenging position, as she needs the help of volunteers AND she needs to be sure that those volunteers are able to do their service effectively without doing damage to the organization. Some training experiences are certainly required. But, one of the difficulties may be offering those in a way that doesn't trigger the kind of defensive reactions we see in this dialogue. Another important issue is the need to provide training to a staff member, Gloria, who likely believes that she's already doing a really good job with the organization. If she is not able to hear that her perspective needs some alteration, her expressions could be toxic for meetings.

Appendix C

Setting the Context and Defining Terms

Intent vs. Impact

Paying attention to this difference can help during conversations about race and racism.

- **Intent:** What one intends through speech or action.
- **Impact:** How one's speech or action is perceived or experienced by another.

*** When dealing with race it is usually far more productive to deal with IMPACT, not INTENT. Most people do not intend to speak or act in ways that reinforce bias, prejudice, or racism. Unfortunately, people often unconsciously act in ways that hurt or offend others. If we hope to have productive dialogues on race, we need to stay open to hear about how even our best efforts are experienced in unintended ways.

Overconfidence and Lack of Confidence:

When we enter multiracial spaces, we often take with us our own discomfort with our racial selves. ... Especially for those of us who have only recently begun to recognize the ways that the more subtle forms of racism emerge, our earlier lack of sensitivity can turn into an awkward oversensitivity. Where once we never noticed race (or at least claimed not to), increased awareness makes issues of race appear ever-present. Race consciousness is at its height and we can often feel paralyzed while trying to figure out how to behave in order to subvert the racism in the room while not appearing racist by concentrating on race in the room!

What will the person of color think? What if I say the wrong thing? Whereas white people can experience a *lack* of confidence when first coming to awareness of race issues, we can also be *overconfident* if we join social causes while seeing racism as existing only outside of ourselves. ... We can be *overconfident* when it comes to our ability to offer ourselves in service if we do not see how our racial socialization affects us and how it might be associated with adverse effects (Tochluk, 2010).

Savior Complex: The savior complex refers to a pattern wherein white people see our participation in a community as essential. ... When our approach incorporates the idea that another group needs us for their betterment, we overestimate the value we bring to the situation. We ignore or justify the effects of our inexperience, saying things like, "At least I am here. Without me, they would be worse off." ... Our mission can be read as missionary, and like those who descend upon another's land without sufficient cultural knowledge and respect, we can do real damage as we neglect cultural mores and unintentionally offend, thereby rendering our work less effective. This same basic scenario plays out ... anywhere we find white people volunteering or hired to "make a difference" in communities other than their own (Tochluk, 2010).

Superiority Complex: The savior complex often goes hand in hand with a sense of superiority. When we approach communities of color with an attitude of internalized superiority (usually not a consciously held opinion), we often move toward leadership

positions before gaining sufficient knowledge of the community's members, concerns, and contexts. Even without this vital information, we sometimes believe that we know what the community's or organization's goals should be and what needs to be done to achieve those goals.

We can also be unconscious of our tendency to take over the direction of conversations. In other words, we take up valuable time and space without dedicating enough time to listen, to learn, and to gain the skills required for success within the community. Making matters worse, we are all too often unconscious of how people of color read this lack of humility as enactments of privilege and racism (Tochluk, 2010).