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UNCOVERING AND CHALLENGING WHITE SUPREMACY

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Trump provides an easy target for critical educators in his clear embodiment of four of the dominant ideologies that frame so much of American life. His claim that as a successful businessman he is the one person who can cut through politics, make deals, and fix the system celebrates capitalism. His assertion that there are very fine people on both sides of white nationalist rallies and his railings against Muslims and Mexicans legitimize white supremacy. His sexual harassment of women and subsequent denials of wrongdoing encapsulate patriarchy. And his fascination with military parades, uniforms, medals, the promotion of himself as a tough guy, and his massive increases in military spending show his embrace of militarism.

The problem with focusing on Trump as a person, however, is that the political project can too easily become "get rid of Trump." He is fascinating in his capacity to enrage as I know all too well myself. I play in a punk rock band and in November 2016 we recorded a song entitled, "Trumpland" that was released on inauguration day.[1] Toward the end of the track I sing a line "grab him by his genitals and leave a scar" and in my voice I can hear the anger and rage pouring out of me. But removing one figure from office, no matter how bombastic and obnoxious that person might be, will make little or no difference in any sustained attempt to challenge the dominant ideologies of American life. That will require sustained education and massive political detoxification. In this chapter I focus specifically on teaching against one of these ideologies, that of white supremacy.

Legitimizing White Supremacy

One of the most striking elements of Trump's Presidential campaign and subsequent election has been the normalization and legitimization of white supremacy.

Critical race theory has long asserted the permanence and centrality of racism in American life.[2] But now it has moved out into the open and its proponents speak it loudly and powerfully, without fear or equivocation. I doubt that such blatant public expressions of racial animus have been in our public space so prominently since the birth of the civil rights era.

By white supremacy I don't mean belonging to the KKK, Aryan Nation, or other far right nationalist groups that openly advocate racial exclusion, violence, or repatriation. I mean instead an ideology, a set of ideas that are embedded in social practices and institutional functioning. Dominant ideologies are powerful precisely because they are not officially proclaimed but rather lived as a matter of course. The central idea of white supremacy is that whites need to be in control of ordering the affairs of the nation because of the "inherent intelligence" they possess. Under white supremacy people of color are viewed as animalistic, governed by primal passions and emotions. Depending on the person concerned they are viewed as soulful or violent, athletic or quick to explode, sensual or spontaneous. The kind of thought required to make objective and rational decisions for the good of all is deemed to be located only in whites who are viewed as able to detach emotion from reason, logic from passion, and focusing the power of their rationality to decide what is best for the body politic.

This is of course close to patriarchy's (another dominant American ideology) emphasis on men as the source of reason and women as the source of compassion. Just as people of color are publicly celebrated for sensual soulfulness, so women are explicitly praised for their feminine qualities of care and empathy. Both white supremacy and patriarchy retain their prominence through an apparent valuing of the groups they are designed to suppress. This neat ideological trick deflects attention from the idea at their core; that white men, by virtue of their "superior ability" to think logically, rationally, and objectively, deserve the power to make decisions for everyone else. How resources should be allocated, how intelligence is measured, who should be elevated into influential positions—basically what legitimate authority and leadership look like—is seen as the exclusive property of whites.

People of color know the power of white supremacy all too well. After all, the attempt to constrain, restrict, and funnel opportunities and possibilities, and the overt or implicit diminishment of humanity is felt every day as the constant reality of life. At its most extreme we see it reflected in white police shootings of unarmed black men justified by the defense that the cops felt genuinely in fear of their lives. Under white supremacy, blackness has been ideologically inscribed as equivalent to danger. If you have grown up as a white person thinking of blackness as representing a state of imminent and uncontrollable violence, then any benign behavior by a black person (such as reaching for an ID or cell phone) is immediately interpreted as reaching for a weapon designed to kill.

Given the all-pervasive nature of ideological conditioning, how can whites who breathe in the air of white supremacy every day come to recognize it as the carbon

monoxide poison it constitutes? And, once it's recognized, how can a white person like myself who is still in the grip of learned racism help other whites unmask and challenge its role in their lives? How do we reach all those white Trump voters who think of themselves as humane, good white people[3] who assert "I don't have a racist bone in my body" and start sentences by saying "I'm not racist, but?" And how about the challenges we need to issue to whites like myself to stop us from sliding into smug self-assurance about our presumed racial cognizance? In a world in which white supremacy is openly enacted, even celebrated, at the highest levels of politics, how can whites wishing to challenge that ideology lead resistant students and colleagues into confronting their own privilege?

The Pedagogy of Self-Disclosure

For me, a major part of answering the questions just posed is developing a pedagogy of disclosure. A call for such disclosure is made by George Yancy in his book *Backlash: What Happens When We Talk Honestly about Racism in America*.[4] Uncompromisingly, Yancy asks whites to acknowledge being racist as an unvarnished empirical fact. Acknowledging one's racism means recognizing both how we live within a racist system that we benefit from, and how we have learned racial biases, instincts, and impulses at a deep level. Whether or not we are righteously committed to working in anti-racist ways is, for him, beside the point. There is no contradiction in whites working as anti-racist leaders, activists, teachers, or citizens and their being racist. This is because racism is *not* the process of individually demeaning or diminishing others, "a site of individual acts of meanness,"[5] but being "implicated in a complex web of racist power relationships … heteronomous webs of white practices to which you, as a white, are linked both as a beneficiary and as co-contributor to such practices."[6] Since my Whiteness constantly benefits me, and since that benefit accrues to me because I'm defined in relation to the stigma of blackness, I am a racist. I don't go about hurling racial epithets but I am "embedded in a pre-existing social matrix of white power"[7] that gives me advantages of which I have only an occasional awareness. To feel safe is my norm, to be "systemically *racially* marked for death"[8] is Yancy's.

Acknowledging my racism is indeed a first step for me when working to uncover and challenge white supremacy with predominantly white audiences. Instead of keeping my own racist actions, impulses, and instincts quiet, I bring them out for public examination. To me, such self-disclosure is the necessary opening to engaging learners in recognizing their own biases and identities, even as they consider themselves to be non-racist. This springs from my pedagogy of critical thinking that is itself grounded in students telling me what most helps them learn to think critically is seeing teachers model the process in front of them.[9] Since uncovering and challenging the ideology of how white supremacy lives within us is critical thinking on steroids, modeling my own attempt to do this seems like a good place to start.

One of the markers of whiteness is being unaware of having a racial identity. Whiteness assumes that only people of color have racial identities. Being white is the de facto un-raced norm. So, as a way of leading students into considering how whiteness is itself a racial identity, I use myself as a case study. I talk about my seven decades of ideological conditioning into white supremacy and the realization that it will never leave me. Growing up in England, whiteness and all things white were taken as the "natural" order of things. I talk about the attitudes and beliefs I picked up in my childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood; that "black people" were alternatively "lazy," "cool," or "violent," Pakistanis and Indians "smelled" and had no respect for British culture, and Gypsies were "thieves" to mark your house as an easy target. I suspect that Trump's life in Queens was not that dissimilar.

These stereotypes were learned through jokes with peers, family conversations, and media images. They flourished in the vacuum of no contact with anyone other than whites like myself. I don't think I had a conversation with a black person until I was 18 years old. The ideology of white supremacy rarely named itself as such. Overt declarations of white racial superiority were rare and, even as racist attitudes were being learned, I was engaged in apparently anti-racist acts. For example, as an undergraduate I participated in demonstrations against the South African Rugby team that represented the then South African apartheid regime. But external behavior often masks learned instincts, and so it was with me.

External events sometimes challenged the power of this ideology. One pivotal event in adolescence helped disrupt the way white supremacy moved in me. This happened at the age of seventeen when I was being beaten up by a gang of white youths (they were "rockers," I was a "mod") in the main street of my local town one Friday night. A black American GI serviceman from a local US Air Force base crossed the street and broke up the fight telling us "everybody's got to be cool now." That man saved me from a potentially severe injury. In my memory I was on the verge of falling to the floor as the GI intervened. Being born in Bootle—a tough inner city, working class part of Liverpool—I knew that once you were on the floor things got a lot worse because then people could kick you in the kidneys and head. That event formed what critical race theory calls a counter-story that disrupted the white supremacist script lodged in my head that said that black people are violent and start fights and white people are peacemakers who sometimes have to use force to reign in black instigators of violence. Here was a stunning role reversal, one that belied the racial and racist myths that I had internalized. That reversal made a big impression on me. It set up a very productive contradiction that I now had to resolve.

At this point in my self-disclosure I will often pause and ask students or colleagues (I teach both academic classes and professional development workshops) to reflect on any ideological interruptions to a white supremacist script they have experienced. When did they see friends act in racist ways that left them disturbed, rather than feeling celebratory? What events can they recall when people of color acted in direct opposition to the stereotypical behaviors accorded to them? How

did they react when people they loved and admired (parents, teachers, ministers, sports heroes) espoused or enacted racism? There are usually numerous instances recounted of participants being astounded that people whom they considered trusted friends and allies voted for Trump. I ask people to share these ideological interruptions via buzz groups or through a social media tool such as *Todays Meet* that allows for anonymous posting.

After describing this incident that happened in my youth and that seems like far-distant history (and therefore less threatening for students), I'll return to my biography and fast-forward to the present day. Here I talk very deliberately about my instinctive reaction to blackness, especially to black maleness. It's often quite dramatic for them to hear me talk about the way that "blackness" screams a complex and contradictory mess of signals to me. In my youth, the "coolness" factor was much higher, mostly because of black musicians and cricketers. In my adulthood, it has been "danger" that predominates, blackness as something animal- istic, uncontrollable, and hence profoundly threatening. I share with my students how I feel an instinctive tightening of my body when I encounter a group of black men. I explain that this reaction is beyond reason, deeply sedimented, learned and transmitted over several decades of media and cultural representations of blackness as violence. I explain to them how my physiology changes as I drive through a mostly black area and how I hear a panicked voice inside my head saying, "whatever happens, please don't let my car stall." I find myself locking the doors, checking my surroundings, and preparing for confrontation. I make sure that I keep explaining how none of this has any connection to my thinking process. I can tell myself "there's your white supremacist conditioning kicking in again" and steel my cognitive warriors to fire their arrows of reason into this oncoming tsunami of emotion. But reasoning doesn't mean much in the face of white supremacist ideological conditioning.

Students or colleagues who hear me talking matter-of-factly about my visceral fear of blackness are shocked, at least judging from the anonymous evaluations of my classes or workshops that I conduct. I think most students see me as a "nice" person who listens to them and takes their concerns seriously. My persona in class is pretty low key and laid back. I do the white thing of striving to maintain emotional calm and replay my own family's horror at dealing with confrontation. I work very conversationally and I can't ever remember getting angry in class. So, to hear overt white supremacy spilling from my lips is jarring for students.

As I'm making these disclosures, I repeatedly point out that I'm doing this to teach them something very specific; being racist is not a matter of individual choice, of deciding, like Trump, to blame all society's ills on illegal immigrants, par- ticularly Mexicans and Muslims. Being racist instead is internalizing a worldview that elevates one racial group above all others and then being unaware of how that worldview underpins institutions, systems, and structures as well as one's own daily behaviors. I like to declare in classes or workshops: "I'm no different to Trump, I'm just as racist. The only difference between us is that he's more overt and vocal

about his racism. But I move mostly unquestioningly through my days in a way that accepts as normal massive economic and educational disparity based on race, the criminalization of black people, and appalling incarceration rates for people of color."

I'll end this brief racial autobiography by talking about where I am now as a white person, a white male, who's constantly struggling to understand what whiteness means while still continuing to miss so much of my ideological conditioning. In saying that as a white person, and therefore as a representative (in the eyes of people of color) of white supremacy, I must expect to be mistrusted. I also disclose how I must anticipate white colleagues accusing me of politically correct reverse racism. Saying this, for me, is *not* a sign that somehow I'm failing; it happens to every white person in this work and that, for different reasons, anti-racist whites should be prepared to be called a racist both by people of color and by whites. It comes with the territory.

As an example of this, I recall a class in which the only student of color, a black man, declared "I will never trust a white person." My response: "that's completely understandable, I don't see why you would." At the time, the white majority in the group were shocked and demoralized by his comment and tried to convince him that they were humane, enlightened, and worthy of his trust. My sense is that completely valid suspicion, skepticism, and hostility by people of color will inevitably accompany any white person's attempt to work alongside them in an anti-racist effort. I tell white people that this is no comment on them personally. It's a comment on how the history of white supremacy has conditioned people of color to expect whites always to pursue their own racial self-interest and bolster their own racial power.

My last autobiographical disclosure is about how I negotiate the seductive internal temptation to tell myself I'm one of the good guys—the militantly moral white exception who has escaped racism and works on the side of light and truth. This temptation is hard to resist and I've often failed dismally to heed its siren call. Colleagues of color detect my need for reassuring approval and tell me not to get so hung up on how *I'm* feeling because, after all, it's not really about me, is it? I try to take deeply to heart George Yancy's admonition that "whatever you do, please don't seek recognition for how sorry you feel."[10]

I tell students that I now understand that the judgment of whether or not you are an ally to people of color is completely out of your control. You should never expect to be told that you are one, and shouldn't get hung up on gauging your anti-racist virtue by whether or not you receive that designation. Of course, if you *do* hear that term applied to you by people of color you should take it as a sincere recognition that you're doing something important and worthwhile. And, for a moment, it's fine to be proud of yourself. We all need moments of recognition and affirmation to keep our energy up for the tough stuff, for the long haul.

And then I ask everyone there to repeat after me; "*never declare yourself an ally*." No matter how strongly you are committed to that identity, I say you should keep

it private. A white person saying "I'm your ally" comes across as condescending and inauthentic. You don't become an ally by saying you are. You become one by consistently showing up in support of people of color. You become one by losing something. Instead of worrying about getting approval for being heroically anti-racist, you should be putting yourself on the line for disapproval. You should be risking institutional condemnation by doing and saying the things that people of color will suffer even more harshly for doing and saying. Your job is to lose friends, colleagues, money, employment, perks, and prestige by calling out white supremacy in yourself and other whites, and then not to have anyone notice or thank you for it.

The Ethical Use of Teacher Power: Structuring Racial Discussions

When I started teaching, I used to think that the longer I ran discussions the less I would need to have ground rules or structure. I envisaged myself being able to walk into a classroom, take the ideological temperature, and extemporaneously think up relevant yet provocative questions. As people started to speak I saw myself riffing like an improvisational jazz musician—picking up common themes, introducing interesting counterpoints, changing tempos, and so on. Most fundamentally, I imagined I'd reach a point where I'd never need to take part in discussions at all. I'd pose a question and then sit back like a fly on the wall observing what was going on without the students realizing I was there.

Yet the opposite has proven to be the case. True, I still love those days when all I have to do is pose a question and then remain silent for the rest of the time, intervening only to make sure everyone gets a chance to contribute. But those are much rarer occasions than I thought they'd be. The longer I run discussions, the more I believe that in discussions of race, privilege, or white supremacy I need to exercise my power as teacher, facilitator, or meeting leader to set protocols for discussion participation and intervene when these are disregarded. I never prescribe where a discussion will end. But I am quite happy to establish structures for people to guide how people communicate with each other.

I regard this as an ethical use of my authority because if I *don't* do this one of several things will probably happen. One is that the discussion will remain distanced from a real engagement with race as people try to keep it at a distance and avoid examining their own collusion in, or enactment of, white supremacy. Alternately, people will be frozen in fear of saying the wrong thing and anxious about being called racist unless some activity deliberately invites participation in a way that feels comfortable. And then there's the ever-present danger of egomaniacs running riot and trying to convert everyone else to their agenda unless something is in place to prevent this from happening.

Because Trump has made the unabashed display of white supremacy acceptable again, people's experiences, prejudices, and ideological assumptions can quickly surface and effectively shut down communication. So, I'll sometimes insist on a

ground rule that we will *not* debate whether or not we live in a racist society, but instead accept this as incontrovertible fact. I ask skeptical students to play what Peter Elbow[11] calls the believing game. For fifteen or twenty-minute periods, I want them to think, speak, and act as if they believed that racism is real and pervasive. Whenever I introduce a specific protocol, I lay out for participants what it's designed to achieve, and how it operates. Of course, community and organizational groups sometimes rebel against my rationale and declare them to be unnecessary. Students rarely do that but can still sabotage protocols by misapplying them, skipping steps, or not following directions.

Despite these problems I still believe that the protocols described below have a good chance of stopping conversations prematurely spiraling out of control or allowing participants to evade the subject. Clear protocols can encourage contributions, equalize participation, acknowledge different learning styles or expressive modes, and keep in check domineering members or confident extroverts. Applying protocols that surface and privilege unacknowledged or excluded perspectives and experiences can help keep people in conversation longer than would be the case if discussions were habitually unstructured and white supremacy was implicitly running the show.

Circle of Voices

Circle of Voices is a small group discussion protocol that I use several times at the outset of my time with a group. It is designed to accomplish three specific things:

- To give everyone in the room a chance to participate by hearing their opinion spoken without anyone interrupting them.
- To make sure that participants hear the widest range of perspectives on a topic before deciding what to focus on.
- To socialize people early on into the idea that listening carefully to what others are saying is the most important habit to learn in discussion.

Circle of Voices begins with a period of mandatory silence. You pose a question to the group and ask for everyone to stay quiet for two minutes as they write down some initial thoughts or responses to the question. Once the two minutes are up, you call time and ask groups of five to form.

Each group then engages in two distinct rounds of conversation. In the first round each person shares for about sixty seconds what they were thinking about or wrote down during the initial two-minute period of silence. The ground rule here is that no interruptions are allowed as each person speaks. Even if extroverts want to jump in and support a speaker by encouraging them or telling them why their comment is so great, this is disallowed. Participants must listen quietly to each person's contribution. This "no interruptions" rule ensures that everyone in the room hears her or his uninterrupted voice in the air at least once during the class session. The longer

that introverts stay silent, the harder it is for them to speak. So, if you want to hear from everybody it's essential that you engineer an early opportunity for that to happen, even if only in a small group. The "no interruptions" rule is also designed to stop an early consensus emerging. Because everyone begins by sharing an unfiltered response to the question, people hear all the perspectives that are held in the group.

Once everyone has spoken their initial uninterrupted response to the question, the second round of open conversation begins. Now anyone can speak in any order and interruptions are fine. However, a new ground rule applies in this second round regarding what people can talk about. Basically, participants can only comment on what another person said in the first round. This can include asking questions about someone's initial contribution, commenting on something that resonated, disagreeing with a comment, or indicating how a first round contribution opened up a new line of thinking. But whatever comments are made in this second round of open conversation they have to link directly and explicitly to something someone said in the first round. This rule is deliberately designed to socialize participants into acquiring the habits of careful listening and attentive responding. Knowing that you can only speak about what someone else said in the initial sharing forces you to listen closely to people's contributions.

Some race-based questions I typically ask during the *Circle of Voices* exercise are the following:

- *What images or actions come to your mind when you hear the term "racism"?*

    This would be a question I'd pose at the start of a session with people who probably hadn't spent much time thinking about race. The idea would be to get a sense of where everyone is in their understanding. However, I have also used this question with relatively advanced groups composed of people experienced in discussing this issue.

- *What is the most important point for you in George Yancy's Dear White America?*[12]

    This kind of question would be used when members had studied some specific material before the discussion. The responses help me understand how people are prioritizing elements of this content and provides a sense of which aspects resonate most with them.

- *What would be an example of white supremacy that you've witnessed or experienced in your everyday life?*

    This question is designed to delve more deeply into participants' lives. I often use the "witnessed or experienced" phrasing because it gives group members the chance to decide how much they wish to reveal. Answering the "witness" part allows people to put some limits on their personal disclosures; responding to the "experience" prompt invites them into direct sharing.

Chalk Talk: *A Visual Discussion*

I'm a word person. I make lists, my PowerPoints are typically bullet points of words, and when I explain something, I rarely use visuals or images. So, one of the things I need to do as a teacher is to ensure that I build in plenty of graphics, slides, and videos for those students who think more visually than me. The *Chalk Talk* exercise, developed by Hilton Smith of the Foxfire Fund,[13] is a great way to construct a visual representation of the different ways group members think about a topic. It also allows you to hear from a lot of people in a very short period of time. I mostly use it to unearth the concerns of a wide range of organizational members before building agendas for change. A *Chalk Talk* dialogue can be an excellent way to kick off an institution wide meeting or workshop on how to combat racism or develop a more diverse, inclusive environment.

The process begins with the leader or teacher writing a question in the center of a large black or whiteboard and circling it. If you're in an online environment, the *Zoom* platform has a whiteboard function allowing for this activity. In auditoriums or large staff development trainings I sometimes have to cover several walls with blank sheets of newsprint for groups of people to write on. Markers or chalk sticks are placed by the board and, once the question is posted, everyone is invited to come and stand by the board to participate in the activity. There is usually a group of non-participants whose skepticism or laziness means they refuse to get out of their seats. I usually go over and invite them to move to the board.

As facilitator you explain that for about five minutes people should write responses to the question on the board. Whilst this is happening, they should stay silent to allow people to think about the question and process the information going up on the board. As well as responding to the original question, people are encouraged to post new questions as well as responses to what's going up on the board. I also ask people to look for postings on different parts of the board that seem to connect in some way. When they see connections, I ask them to draw a line connecting the relevant postings and to write a brief remark along that line about why these two comments seem to be similar. I also ask that they follow the same process—draw a connecting line with a few words of explanation along the line—when they see two comments that appear to be contradictory, or to represent significantly different responses.

Several people usually start writing immediately on different parts of the board. I also participate by drawing lines connecting comments, writing questions, adding my own thoughts, and so on. After five or six minutes there's often a lull in posting, or the board has become so full that there's no more space for people to write or draw anything else. I'll then announce that the silent part of the activity is over and that we can now stand back, view the whole board, and start looking for common clusters of responses. I'll point out all the different handwriting styles that signify how many people have posted. In five minutes or so,

you typically secure input from 60 to 70 percent of participants who will have posted a comment, drawn an image, or created a line connecting points together. If, in a similar five-minute period, I had posed a question verbally to the whole group and then asked them to speak their responses, I would have heard from maybe three or four people and felt compelled to earn my wages by responding in some way to each comment.

The first couple of times I use *Chalk Talk*, I'll do the initial debrief by myself. I keep participants standing by the blackboard as I look first for comments that generate the most lines in and out. I explain that since these have generated the most dialogue, they probably represent issues for further discussion. But I also look for outliers—comments that stand alone and generate no lines. I point out that these could represent important blind spots or omissions and that we need to look at them carefully. By the third or fourth time I run a *Chalk Talk* dialogue I change things up and ask participants to start running the debriefing. Standing by the board they point out common themes, clusters of comments that get lots of attention, and outliers.

The final stage is to invite everyone to take pictures of the dialogue on their laptops, smart phones, tablets, and other hand-held devices. I do this because I often run a *Chalk Talk* exercise at the outset of a new unit of study, or as the first activity in a community dialogue. Photographing or videoing the board allows us to return to this dialogue over the coming weeks as we go deeper into the topic.

Here are some questions I have used as the focus for *Chalk Talk* dialogues based around race:

- *When have you witnessed, experienced, or enacted a racial microaggression?*

  This question offers participants multiple frames for posting on the board. Those who have been on the receiving end of such an action can share how that felt, while others can talk about how they've seen microaggressions committed. The term "enacted" invites those with a degree of self-awareness to share times they've committed these kinds of aggressions. This question has been very helpful in generating dialogues that clarify the subtle, slippery nature of such acts.

- *What does an anti-racist environment look, sound, or feel like?*

  The "look, sound, or feel like" is a common formulation for a *Chalk Talk* dialogue. It is designed to free up people's creativity by encouraging them to draw images that represent feelings and sounds. Interesting variants on this format are:

- *What does white supremacy look, sound, or feel like?*
- *What does privilege look, sound, or feel like?*
- *What does systemic racism look, sound, or feel like?*

Although I typically use *Chalk Talk* to communicate early on a sense of the different agendas and experiences that group members hold surrounding race, I have also used it in a more summative way. It's interesting to pose the same question you used in an opening session as the final activity a group conducts. Comparing the two graphics presented can indicate how far a group has grown. For example, when I pose the *What does an anti-racist environment look, sound, or feel like?* question as the bookend to a group's time together some very clear differences usually emerge. In the first visual there will be multiple comments about institutional conduct, personal behavior, and organizational policy. The emphasis is all on actions "out there" in the world. In the summative graphic the postings are usually focused much more inwardly as people also emphasize the importance of rooting out racism in themselves.

Circular Response

Developed by adult educator Eduard Lindeman,[14] this exercise shares the circular seating format of *Circle of Voices* but is significantly more complex. I would never use this protocol early on in a group's history but instead hold it in reserve until we're past the mid-point of our allotted time together.

The process begins with the facilitator, or the group itself, posing a common question. People form themselves in circles of ten to twelve members. They are silent until one person decides to start off the conversation by giving an initial response to the question posed. In this first round of conversation, people are asked to keep their comments to a maximum of two minutes and not to interrupt each other, no matter how enthusiastic they are about a contribution or how much they want to ask questions about it.

After the first person has finished speaking, the person to the left goes next. After taking the time silently to process the initial speaker's comments she also takes two minutes to speak with no interruptions. However, whatever she says must build on, or respond to, the initial speaker's comments. This response does not have to be an endorsement or paraphrase of the opening contribution. The second speaker can raise a criticism, express a disagreement, extend the first comment in an unpredictable way, or simply say she finds it difficult to come up with a response. In this last case she says something about her source of difficulty; maybe the first speaker used unaccustomed language or was talking about unfamiliar experiences.

The third speaker then has up to two minutes of uninterrupted air time to build on or respond to the second speaker's comments and the process continues around the circle until everyone has spoken. I advocate that the facilitator be a part of the group but that she or he not be the first to speak. It's important for teachers to show that sometimes they need time to think before speaking, that they too struggle to build on previous comments, and that they're striving to listen carefully.

During this first conversational phase, anxiety is usually high as people wait anxiously for their turn, hoping and praying the person before them says something they can make sense of and respond to. I notice people leaning in to follow what people do with their comments and how those frame subsequent contributions. Once everyone has spoken in this first round the group moves into open conversation with no ground rules, time limits, or order of speech. People can introduce completely new topics, express support or disagreement, extend previous contributions, or raise questions about something someone said in the first round.

The design of *Circular Response* is intended to achieve two things. First, to do this well you have to listen carefully. After all, if you don't attend closely to the person before you then your opportunity to respond appropriately to their comments is significantly reduced. Paying careful attention to an unfamiliar perspective is particularly important where race is concerned since people often bring such entrenched worldviews to this topic. The ground rule disallowing interruptions in the first round of talk means people have to attend to experiences, opinions, and stories very different to their own. Second, as the first round of discussion progresses one or two issues often seem to keep surfacing, albeit with different interpretive frames. So, when people move into the open discussion phase, they're more primed to see complexities and contradictions. This is very helpful when considering the multi-layered topic of race.

Some typical questions I have used for this protocol are:

- *What are the most powerful blinkers to whites seeing their own racism?*

  By the time I introduce *Circular Response* the group has got to know each other fairly well so a potentially threatening or probing question like this is more possible than at earlier stages of the group's existence. The complexity of the question seems to suit the first round of the protocol, since people often wait and think about their response to the previous speaker's comment on this topic.

- *What's the best way to open someone else's eyes to a different racial perspective?*

  I like to use action-oriented questions in *Circular Response* discussions since these typically occur after people have spent a considerable time becoming acquainted with the building blocks of racial cognizance (white supremacy, white privilege, microaggressions, aversive racism, interest convergence, and so on). By then lots of stories have been shared and experiences analyzed. So, when we get round to doing this protocol people are usually ready to focus on taking action.

- *How should we respond as outsiders when we witness racism?*

  This question is worded to focus on times when someone with little positional power or authority wishes to take action but is either not used to having

their voice taken seriously or knows they will suffer serious consequences for speaking up or protesting. The intent of the question is to move people into realizing the need for solidarity, alliances, and networking in any social change effort. Although making an individual stand is important, I want people to shift their frame toward the crucial dynamic of collective mobilization. Organizations and institutions are far more likely to integrate anti-racist policies, structures, and practices when people collectively commit to holding them accountable.

Bohmian Dialogue

The longest discussion protocol I use is *Bohmian Dialogue*. Named after theoretical physicist David Bohm,[15] this process builds on his attempt to create an open forum to explore intractable problems. The purpose is to build an organic conversation in which participants collectively create meaning by recognizing connections and commonalities and by building on each other's ideas as freely as possible. The activity is designed for large groups of around forty people, but I have also used it with groups of fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five. Bohm recommends spending up to two hours in this dialogue but it can also be used for forty-five-minute periods.

The first stage in a *Bohmian Dialogue* is for people to study some common resource. When an academic class is engaged in the process you can ask students to read or view some pertinent material beforehand. Because I use this activity mostly in organizational or community settings where I don't know who will show up, I usually begin the process with everybody viewing some relevant video. One of my favorites is the *New York Times'* "Op Doc" *A Conversation with My Black Son*[16] in which black parents recount how they prepare their sons to be pulled over and racially profiled by the police and the different ways they advise them to respond to this event. Another is the "What It Means to Be American" excerpt from the *Color of Fear* documentary.[17] Here a black man (Victor) expresses his pain, anger, and frustration in response to a white man (David) who has told him to stop obsessing on race and just be American.

After the videos are over, the group forms the chairs into one large circle and I explain how the process will work. I begin by stating what the conversation is for. I say that there are two primary reasons we're doing this. First, we want to understand the different experiences of race and racism that are in the room so we can try to identify and develop possible points of common connection. Second, we want to build on the intersections we discover to explore steps we can take to combat racism. We are trying to develop some collective thinking about how we can best make common cause against white supremacy.

I remind people that these are both incredibly difficult projects so if we are to have any hope of success we need to listen carefully and intently to each other and spend a lot of time processing the meaning others' contributions have for us. I predict that there'll be necessarily long periods of silence in the room as people digest and mull over what others have just said. I urge participants to try and be

comfortable with the room being quiet and insist that this is an essential part of the process.

Then it's time to explain the specific ground rules that structure *Bohmian Dialogue*.

- There are no winners or losers here so don't try to overpower or diminish contributions you dislike or take issue with.
- This is not a debate so try to refrain from creating binary opposites ("he's racist but she's anti-racist," "that's liberating but this is oppressive").
- Don't try to convince or persuade; the point is to understand and connect where we can.
- Only one person speaks at a time.
- Speak only when you have something to say or you have a response that's prompted by another person's remarks.
- Be comfortable with long silences.
- If it helps you focus, feel free to close your eyes or look at the floor.
- Expect radically different opinions and perspectives but express them in just that way, as different "takes" on an issue.
- Focus on identifying common ground and how to build on this.

I also need to clarify my own role in the dialogue. I let people know that I'll be both contributor and umpire. If people start to get into a debate, try to convince or rebut each other, or declare another contribution to be wrong, my job is to step in and remind people of the point of the exercise. We are trying to understand the alterity of racial experience and to find points of common connection that can prompt action, not to blame people for their wrong opinions.

Some questions suited to this activity are

- *What would it take for us to trust each other?*

   This question is suited to multiracial groups that include whites whom you feel are too quick to declare themselves allies and assume that, having made this declaration, they will be welcomed and trusted by people of color.

- *What stops us realizing our common potential?*

   This question works well with groups that are getting frustrated with their inability to progress as fast as they'd like in some kind of anti-racist work. In groups like this it's easy for people to slip into race-based blaming and commit all kinds of unwitting microaggressions.

- *What do we most miss or misunderstand about how racism works?*

   Here you're trying to challenge a group to go deeper into analyzing the workings of racism. I use this question if I feel the group is slipping into an easy certainty of assuming that just by citing the clear existence of racism and

the injuries it inflicts, people will be convinced to give up racist ideas and practices. My hope is that the deeper, visceral, and emotionally sedimented nature of white supremacy will be revealed.

- *How do we build common cause?*

  This question is project-focused and one that appeals to many people. It is hopeful and oriented to the future. Of course, once people start responding to it the complexities of how people define common cause, let alone how this is realized, quickly come to the fore.

Appreciative Pause

This final activity is used as a coda to intensive discussions on race. One of the behaviors most absent in discussions is that of people giving appreciation for the contributions others have made to their learning. So, after a race-based discussion, particularly one that has been tense, fraught, and emotional (in other words, after pretty much every discussion on race!) I find it's helpful to practice the *Appreciative Pause*. This is a brief period during which *only* expressions of appreciation are allowed. Appreciations are publicly spoken (in small or large groups) for questions posed that suggested a whole new line of thinking, comments that clarified something that up to then was confusing, connections identified between ideas or contributions, risks that people took in opening themselves up to the group, and examples that were provided that increased understanding of a difficult concept. People also identify tonal contributions, referencing the honesty, supportiveness, and empathy demonstrated by peers.

Final Comment

We might replace Trump, but it won't be so easy to replace white supremacy with an anti-racist commitment in ourselves to communicate across different racial identities and find our common humanity. That work will require a willingness for whites to be open about their struggle to uncover and challenge the white supremacy that lives within them, and it will also need discussions where people are willing to stay with extended discomfort and to hear each other out. But I often think that Trump's unashamed expression of white supremacy has, in a weird way, done us all a favor. Now nobody can assert with a straight face that we live in a post-racial world in which difference is embraced and systemic racial violence has disappeared. The permanent ugliness of white supremacy is on full display for all to see and we have to find ways to fight it.

Notes

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