

The Benefits of Being White Exercise

by Paul Kivel

Tell the group that you are going to read a series of statements and that each white people to whom a statement applies should stand up after that statement is read. Tell the group that all the white people are being asked to participate, and people of color are being asked to observe.

Those who are physically unable to stand may raise their hand to indicate that they are part of the group standing. Each participant should decide for themselves whether the statement applies to them or not. If they are unwilling to stand for a particular statement that applies to them they may pass for that statement but should notice any feelings they have about not standing. The exercise will be done in silence to allow participants to notice the feelings that come up during the exercise and to make it safer for all participants. After a statement is read and people have stood for a few moments, ask participants to sit down and read the next statement.

White Benefits Checklist

Please stand if:

1. Your ancestors were legal immigrants to this country during a period when immigrants from Asia, South and Central America or Africa were restricted.
2. Your ancestors came to this country of their own free will and have never had to relocate unwillingly once here.
3. You live on land that formerly belonged to Native Americans.
4. Your family received homesteading or landstaking claims from the federal government or you or your family or relatives receive or received federal farm subsidies, farm price supports, agricultural extension assistance or other federal benefits.
5. You lived or live in a neighborhood that people of color were discriminated from living in.

6. You lived or live in a city where red-lining discriminates against people of color getting housing or other loans.
7. You or your parents went to racially segregated schools.
8. You live in a school district or metropolitan area where more money is spent on the schools that white children go to than on those that children of color attend.
9. You live in or went to a school district where children of color are more likely to be disciplined than white children, or more likely to be tracked into nonacademic programs.
10. You live in or went to a school district where the textbooks and other classroom materials reflected your race as normal, heroes and builders of the United States, and there was little mention of the contributions of people of color to our society.
11. You were encouraged to go on to college by teachers, parents or other advisors.
12. You attended a publicly funded university, or a heavily endowed private university or college, and/or received student loans.
13. You served in the military when it was still racially segregated, or achieved a rank where there were few people of color, or served in a combat situation where there were large numbers of people of color in dangerous combat positions, or avoided serving in the military when young men of color had fewer options for avoiding service.
14. Your ancestors were immigrants who took jobs in railroads, streetcars, construction, shipbuilding, wagon and coach driving, house painting, tailoring, longshore work, brick laying, table waiting, working in the mills, furriering, dressmaking or any other trade or occupation where people of color were driven out or excluded.

15. You received job training in a program where there were few or no people of color
16. You have received a job, job interview, job training or internship through personal connections of family or friends.
17. You worked or work in a job where people of color made less for doing comparable work or did more menial jobs.
18. You have worked in a job where people of color were hired last, or fired first.
19. You work in a job, career or profession or in an agency or organization in which there are few people of color.
20. You received small business loans or credits, government contracts or government assistance in your business.
21. Your parents were able to vote in any election they wanted without worrying about poll taxes, literacy requirements or other forms of discrimination.
22. You can always vote for candidates who reflect your race.
23. You live in a neighborhood that has better police protection, municipal services and is safer than that where people of color live.
24. The hospital and medical services close to you or which you use are better than that of most people of color in the region in which you live.
25. You have never had to worry that clearly labeled public facilities, such as swimming pools, restrooms, restaurants and nightspots were in fact not open to you because of your skin color.
26. You see white people in a wide variety of roles on television and in movies.

27. Your race needn't be a factor in where you choose to live.
 28. Your race needn't be a factor in where you send your children to school.
 29. A substantial percentage of the clothes you wear are made by women and children of color in this country and abroad.
 30. Most of the food you eat is grown, processed and/or cooked by people of color in this country and abroad.
 31. The house, office building, school, or other buildings and grounds you use are cleaned or maintained by people of color.
 32. You, other family members, friends or colleagues were ever cared for by people of color either at home or at a medical or convalescent facility.
 33. You don't need to think about race and racism everyday. You can choose when and where you want to respond to racism.
- * After the exercise ask white people to pair with other white people to talk about what feelings and thoughts came up for them participating in the exercise. Ask people of color to pair with other people of color to share what came up for them and what it was like to observe white people doing the exercise.
 - * Reassemble the group and facilitate a group discussion of the feelings, thoughts, reflections, and insights that people want to share.
 - * To conclude the discussion tell the group that the purpose of this exercise is not to discount what white people have achieved but to question prevalent assumptions that everyone started out with equal opportunity or that white achievement occurs on a level playing field.

- * Also remind them that although some of the benefits listed above are money in the bank for each and every white person some white people have bigger bank accounts much bigger than the rest. According to 1992 figures, 1 percent of the population controls about 48 percent of the net financial wealth of this country. In 1996, women generally made about 74 cents for every dollar that men made. People with disabilities, people with less formal education, and people who are lesbian, gay or bi-sexual face substantial discrimination.
- * Benefits from racism are amplified or diminished by our relative privilege. All white people benefit in some ways from whiteness, but some have cornered the market on significant benefits from being white to the exclusion of the rest.
- * Finally, point out that individual white people are not responsible for the circumstances under which they stood for particular questions in the exercise. They were born into and inherited a system which exploits people of color and provides benefits to white people whether they want them or not. Individual white people are not responsible for racism—but they are responsible for how they respond to it.

Tools for White Guys who are Working for Social Change

(and other people socialized in a society based on domination)

1. Practice noticing who's in the room at meetings - how many men, how many women, how many white people, how many people of color, is it majority heterosexual, are there out queers, what are people's class backgrounds. Don't assume to know people, but also work at being more aware.
 - 2a. Count how many times you speak and keep track of how long you speak.
 - 2b. Count how many times other people speak and keep track of how long they speak.
3. Be conscious of how often you are actively listening to what other people are saying as opposed to just waiting your turn and/or thinking about what you'll say next.

4. Practice going to meetings focused on listening and learning; go to some meetings and do not speak at all.
- 5a. Count how many times you put ideas out to the group.
- 5b. Count how many times you support other people's ideas for the group.
6. Practice supporting people by asking them to expand on ideas and get more in-depth, before you decide to support the idea or not.
- 7a. Think about whose work and contribution to the group gets recognized.
- 7b. Practice recognizing more people for the work they do and try to do it more often.
8. Practice asking more people what they think about meetings, ideas, actions, strategy and vision. White guys tend to talk amongst themselves and develop strong bonds that manifest in organizing. This creates an internal organizing culture that is alienating for most people. Developing respect and solidarity across race, class, gender and sexuality is complex and difficult, but absolutely critical - and liberating.
9. Be aware of how often you ask people to do something as opposed to asking other people "what needs to be done".
10. Think about and struggle with the saying, "you will be needed in the movement when you realize that you are not needed in the movement".
11. Struggle with and work with the model of group leadership that says that the responsibility of leaders is to help develop more leaders, and think about what this means to you.
12. Remember that social change is a process, and that our individual transformation and individual liberation is intimately interconnected with social transformation and social liberation. Life is profoundly complex and there are many contradictions. Remember that the path we travel is guided by love, dignity and respect - even when it is bumpy and difficult to navigate.
13. This list is not limited to white guys, nor is it intended to reduce all white guys into one category. This list is intended to disrupt patterns of domination which hurt our movement and hurt each other. White guys have a lot of work to do, but it is the kind of work that makes life worth living.
14. Day-to-day patterns of domination are the glue that maintain systems of domination. The struggle against capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexism and the state, is also the struggle towards collective liberation.
15. No one is free until all of us are free.

From the Colours of Resistance webpage

Checklist for White Allies Against Racism

How often do you behave as an ally to people of color?

Adapted from notes from John Raible: "I devised this checklist after thinking, as a person of color, about the white people I know with whom I have developed some degree of trust. I wanted to articulate the specific behaviors I see them engaging in which lead me to appreciate their actions on behalf of students of color and against racism in general."

Part 1

1. I am present at meetings to make sure anti-racism is part of the discussion.
2. I demonstrate knowledge and awareness of the issues of racism.
3. I use the language and political worldview of anti-racism.
4. I continually educate myself and others about racism.
5. I recognize my own limitations as a white person doing anti-racist work.
6. I raise issues about racism over and over, both in public and in private.
7. I realize "it's not about me." I can be objective and avoid over-personalizing issues that people of color raise.
8. I can identify racism as it is happening.
9. I can strategize and work in coalition with others to advance anti-racist work.
10. I attend to group dynamics to ensure the inclusion of people of color.
11. I support and validate the comments and actions of people of color and other allies. (But not in a paternalistic manner!)
12. I strive to share power with people of color.
13. I take a personal interest in the lives and welfare of individual people of color.
14. I use my privilege to communicate information from the dominant group to people of color.
15. I hold high expectations for people of color.
16. I reach out to initiate contact with people of color.
17. I listen carefully so that I am more likely to understand the needs of people of color.
18. I can adopt and articulate a person of color's point of view when it may be helpful.
19. I can accept leadership from people of color.

Part II (Includes the characteristics in Part 1)

1. I work side-by-side with people of color on tasks, projects, and actions.
2. I can debrief with people of color to give and receive "reality checks" and affirmations after meetings, events, and actions.
3. I readily understand—with no explanations necessary—a person of color's position or perception.
4. I have joking relationships with individual people of color.
5. I can vent with and be present for people of color when they need to vent feelings about racism.
6. I debate issues with people of color and take their ideas seriously.
7. I take risks in relating to people of color and take their ideas seriously.
8. I demonstrate shared values with people of color, for example, impatience with the

rate of change, anger and injustice, etc.

9. I know the private lives and families of friends who are people of color.
10. I can relax and socialize and be at ease with people of color.

Part III - The following are some problematic areas where white people seem to get stuck. Do they apply to you?

1. I am not clear on the words people of color prefer to use to identify themselves.
2. When people of color point out racism as it is happening, I feel personally attacked.
3. I rely on people of color for education about my own (& institutional) racism.
4. I use meetings and organizing time to establish my anti-racist credentials.
5. It is important to me to point out examples of "reverse racism" when I see them.
6. I have been told I act in a racist manner without knowing it, but I think I'm being an ally.
7. I speak for people of color and attempt to explain their positions.
8. I focus on mediating between people of color for other whites.
9. I see my role as interpreting the behavior of people of color for other whites.
10. I prefer to spend anti-racist time & energy dealing with my personal feelings and issues rather than moving the anti-racist agenda forward.
11. I intellectualize about the struggle rather than live it daily.
12. I wait for people of color to raise white people's awareness.
13. I know well fewer than five individual peers who are people of color.

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