Disrupting White Dominant Culture:
Reflection Questions for white People[1] Working for Racial Justice

As white people, we are responsible for continuing to build our knowledge and skills to identify how white dominant culture[2] is manifesting in our thinking and behavior and how it is operating in organizations we interact in/with. We must then work to disrupt it, center Blackness[3] and work for racial justice in how we live our lives.

As you think about different situations you are in, be it an interpersonal interaction, participating in a decision-making process, making a decision, addressing conflict or tension, or dealing with a challenging set of issues in the workplace, the following set of questions can guide you to:

- analyze the situation so you can reflect on your assumptions and perceptions,
- reflect on what your response and action(s) can be, in accountability with others[4]
- consider your intent and the potential impact of the actions you decide to take, and
- reflect afterwards about the action(s) taken, including what lessons you learned from the experience and from people you are accountable to.

Before You Start the Reflection Process[5]

Before you dive into the reflection questions, please consider the following:

- Consider going through this reflection process with others and/or talk with people after you have finished your reflections and determined your action. It is an opportunity for you to be in relationship with others, for people to challenge your thinking, for you to receive feedback on your

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[1] These reflections questions will be more helpful for white people who have a basic understanding of structural racism, white privilege, and white dominant culture. If you are unfamiliar with these concepts, please explore www.racialequitytools.org

[2] By "white [dominant] culture," we mean the dominant, unquestioned standards of behavior and ways of functioning embodied by the vast majority of institutions in the United States. Because it is so normalized it can be hard to see, which only adds to its powerful hold. In many ways, white dominant culture is indistinguishable from what we might call U.S. culture or norms – a focus on individuals over groups, for example, or an emphasis on the written word as a form of professional communication. But it operates in even more subtle ways, by actually defining what "normal" is – and likewise, what "professional," "effective," or even "good" is. In turn, white culture also defines what is not good, "at risk," or "unsustainable." White culture values some ways – ways that are more familiar and come more naturally to those from a white, western tradition – of thinking, behaving, deciding, and knowing, while devaluing or rendering invisible other ways. And it does this without ever having to explicitly say so." Gulati-Partee, Gita, and Maggie Potapchuk. "Paying Attention to White Culture and Privilege: A Missing Link to Advancing Racial Equity." The Foundation Review 6, no. 1 (2014): 25-38. For more information about white dominant culture, read the seminal piece by Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones. White Supremacy Culture. ChangeWork (2001).

[3] Here are three resources, among many, which provide some ideas on how to operationalize centering Blackness: Price, Anne, Jhumpa Bhattacharya, and Dorian Warren. "Centering Blackness: The Path to Economic Liberation for All." Medium. (June 18 2020). BlackSpace. "Black Space Manifesto." (2020). Trent Johnson, Erin. "Love Is in Need: 5 Things You Can Do to Center Black Freedom." Medium. (June 19 2020).

[4] "In the context of racial equity work, accountability refers to the ways in which individuals and communities hold themselves to their goals and actions, and acknowledge the values and groups to which they are responsible. To be accountable, one must be visible, with a transparent agenda and process. Invisibility defies examination; it is, in fact, employed in order to avoid detection and examination. Accountability demands commitment. It might be defined as "what kicks in when convenience runs out." Accountability requires some sense of urgency and becoming a true stakeholder in the outcome. Accountability can be externally imposed (legal or organizational requirements), or internally applied (moral, relational, faith-based, or recognized as some combination of the two) on a continuum from the institutional and organizational level to the individual level. From a relational point of view, accountability is not always doing it right. Sometimes it's really about what happens after it's done wrong." From Cushing, Bonnie Berman with Lila Cabbil, M. Freeman, J. Hitchcock, and K. Richards. Accountability and White Anti-Racist Organizing: Stories from Our Work. Roselle, NJ: Crandall, Dostie & Douglass Books, 2010. For examples in practice, go to Accountability section on www.racialequitytools.org

[5] If you are unsure of some of the terms being used, please explore the glossary on www.racialequitytools.org. There are also many resources to build your knowledge and skills on the site.

analysis and decisions, and for you to request support to implement your action/response and build accountability for your actions.

- Some of these questions may fit your situation or decision or issue, other questions may not. Skip those that don't. However, notice whether you are skipping the question because you don't know the answer, don't want to explore something that may be difficult or uncomfortable, or because the question is just not relevant to your situation.

- After you determine which questions are relevant, take time to go through each question even if it may seem like a lot of questions. By reflecting on each question, you can build your skills and knowledge to identify, interrupt, and address your own and possibly organizational behavior that is creating or reinforcing white dominant culture. After using the relevant questions for different situations, modify these questions and create new ones to use and build your analysis and increase the actions you are taking to disrupt white dominant culture and center Blackness.

- You may find you don't know or are unsure of the answer. This is part of the process - learning what we don't know. It is most important to reflect on the questions from a place of honesty and vulnerability. When you don't know how to respond to a question or notice you are unsure, note it as a place for you to learn more, ask further questions, and reach out for support.

Taking a Moment to Ground Yourself and Re-imagine the World…

As you begin your reflection of your situation, remind yourself and center yourself on your commitment to racial justice and dismantling the system of white supremacy and racism. Take a moment, reflecting on, or journaling, or drawing, or sharing with others your response to the following re-imagining question:

What is your vision of a racially just world you are working to create?

Getting clear on your stake in this work can support you in not showing up in a charitable or patronizing way, operating from a place of fear or assuming you are the savior, but rather being grounded in your vision of the world and focused on how your liberation is bound with the liberation of Black, Indigenous and other People of Color (BIPOC). As you reflect on your vision of a just and liberated world, consider the importance of listening to and supporting the leadership of BIPOC. Keep this in mind as you decide on the action you will take and how it is connected to your vision.[6]

> "Identifying self-interest is essential because it allows individuals to work not simply as allies but as accomplices in our collective liberation…. Interrogating self-interest allows us to identify what's at stake for ourselves, even when we are not the most directly impacted."
> ~Charlene A. Carruthers
> *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*

Structural racism oppresses Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, and it along with the system of white supremacy harms everyone, including white people though, very differently.[7] Think about how the impact of systemic racism may be present – in your heart and in your body.

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[6] Thanks to Scott Winn for your insight and offering this important grounding question and framing.
[7] Kivel, Paul. "The Costs of Racism to White People." *www.paulkivel.com*. (2002).

Before you start using the reflection questions, take a moment and take some deep breaths. Be connected with your body and the signals it is sharing with you during this reflection process (e.g. feeling flushed, tightening your muscles, getting a pit in your stomach). Listen to your body. Be kind to your body and continue to take some deep breaths and/or stretch. Notice the impact on your body and heart. Then explore the following questions:

Individual Reflection Questions:

1. Reflect for a moment on your own racial identity, and the racial identities of the people involved in the situation. Consider what the different racial identities may reveal as you think about this situation. Consider your own white privilege.[8]
2. What are the different positional (e.g. manager, co-chair, entry-level staff person, member) roles present? What is your positional role within the circle of people involved? Describe the power dynamics and reflect on your role within them.
3. What are your relationships with the people involved? What do you perceive as the level of trust between you and the others? Is there a history of giving and receiving feedback? Is there a history of conflict/tension that may not have been discussed and/or addressed?
4. As you consider all of this, what impact do you think your identity, role, power, and white privilege may be having in this situation?
5. How might your ego be involved in your assumptions about the situation? (This question is not judging the presence of your ego, but rather asking if your ego is driving your assumptions about the situation or the people involved – e.g., wanting to be right, wanting to be viewed as the "good" white person, etc.)
6. What is your motivation in this situation? Is it tied into how you want to be perceived? Are you concerned about personal consequences? Are you centering your own personal agenda or a desire to be a savior? Are you focused on your role and responsibility as a white person to address white dominant culture, anti-blackness[9] and racism?
7. *As you reflect on this situation and consider your role and responsibility to address racial inequities and anti-blackness and how white dominant culture is manifesting, explore if any of these behaviors or perceptions are present? (Some of these may not be relevant to your situation)*

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[8] To learn more about white privilege, explore the resource page on www.racialequitytools.org

[9] "Anti-Blackness …[is] a two-part formation that both voids Blackness of value, while systematically marginalizing Black people and their issues. The first form of anti-Blackness is overt racism. Beneath this anti-Black racism is the covert structural and systemic racism which categorically predetermines the socioeconomic status of Blacks in this country. The structure is held in place by anti-Black policies, institutions, and ideologies. The second form of anti-Blackness is the unethical disregard for anti-Black institutions and policies. This disregard is the product of class, race, and/or gender privilege certain individuals experience due to anti-Black institutions and policies. This form of anti-Blackness is protected by the first form of overt racism. The Movement for Black Lives

a. How might I be trivializing the experience of others, specifically Black, Indigenous, and other People of color or people of other identities that are marginalized in the organization?

b. Am I privileging a certain way of doing things that is reinforcing white dominant culture?

c. Are there assumptions I am making about what might be best for this person(s), acting from my internalized racial superiority[10]?

d. Am I considering the systemic and cultural context and impact or am I solely focusing only on individual behaviors and impact?

e. Am I exploring whether the conflict is based on past harm, different worldviews[11], different cultures, power differentials etc. or assuming it is solely based on interpersonal issues?

f. Am I considering 'both and' or am I making an assumption there is one way to accomplish the task or respond, or address a situation?

g. Am I asking questions to understand context and motivation or am I assuming something about a person's demeanor or behavior based on stereotypes and biases?

h. Am I in conversation with people most impacted in this situation as I think through expectations or a response? Am I creating expectations based on my own experience and assumptions of what I think is best?

i. Am I checking any hesitancy I may have to act and seeing whether I am self-censoring to avoid making waves, operating from a place of my own "safety", or being silent because I don't want to be wrong or make a mistake?

8. Who am I accountable to? What accountability practices will I exercise as I take action?

9. What are some possible action steps I could take?

10. Going back to your vision of the world, check in with yourself and see if these possible actions fulfill your role and responsibility to contribute to this vision of a just world?

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[10] "A simple way to define internalized white superiority is the beliefs, thoughts, and assumptions [of white people and cultures as better than other racial groups] that live inside of my white body and my white brain, which influence my actions." Jen Willsea. https://www.jenwillsea.com/blog/got-internalized-white-superiority-the-danger-of-denial-and-the-promise-of-another-way

[11] A worldview refers to your view about how the world works. We all operate from a worldview. Your worldview influences how you interpret events – and it's important to examine and understand your own. Worldviews can be rooted in culture or faith or your evolving understanding of the world. There are many worldviews – such as, "The world is structured to support some people at the expense of others." Or "we all have equal possibilities if we just work hard." Or "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead.

11. As you reflect on your possible actions, are you centering your relationship with the people involved? How are your actions supporting the continued learning and work for racial justice of the individual(s) involved?

Determining the Actions to Take - Reflection Questions

1. As I am determining my actions, how have I or will I center the voices and leadership of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color?

2. Going back to the earlier question about worldview, am I privileging a viewpoint that is in agreement with my own worldview? What other viewpoints do I need to learn from and consider before acting? [12]

3. Am I willing to take risks in implementing these action steps?

What action(s) will you take at this time?

4. How might the action I plan to take reinforce and support systemic racism, anti-blackness, and white dominant culture? In what ways? How do I need to change my actions to ensure it is advancing my vision of racially just world?

5. What makes me think I am "right" in taking this action? What could be the 'both and' in this situation?

6. Have I checked to see if my own sense of urgency and/or a need to "fix it" is being prioritized by taking this action?

7. What are the consequences of my action on different identity groups? Who stands to lose, if anyone, if I take these actions? [13] Am I placing other people, specifically Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, at risk by what I plan to do? How am I addressing those risks?

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[12] Thanks to Sally Leiderman, www.capd.org, for sharing this question from the Transforming White Privilege curriculum – Mental Checklist Module.
[13] ibid

8. Who is being protected, and who might be harmed by my actions? Who is being advantaged, and who is being disadvantaged by my actions? What might be the potential unintended consequences of my action?

9. Is the action I am taking based on operating from a place of comfort? Will my action place any burden on Black, Indigenous and other People of Color?

10. How am I preparing to potentially be in conflict with people or groups as I take this action? What are ways to address any potential consequences and possible backlash of my actions?

11. As I take this action, how am I being accountable to Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color as well as white people working for racial justice?

12. What support do I need to implement my action? From whom do I need to seek feedback and assessment of impact of my action?

Reflecting on My Actions

1. What was the impact of my actions? Do I believe it contributed to addressing systemic racism, anti-blackness, and white dominant culture?

2. Were there any unintended consequences from my actions that I need to address?

3. Did I follow-through on my accountability practice?

4. Did I receive feedback on my actions? What did I learn from that feedback? Do I need to talk with people who are involved, learn more about an issue or a practice or the impact of my actions, apologize for my action or its impact, and/or take other or further actions?

5. Did Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color share their feedback directly or indirectly? How am I prioritizing their feedback in how I am processing the situation, and in my future actions?[14] How will I be accountable to these individuals going forward?

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[14] Thank you to Sonali Sangeeta Balajee for sharing this question. https://www.ourbodhiproject.com/

6. Reflecting on my analysis using these questions, what would I change based on what I learned by my actions?

7. Next time, I will....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: