Common Patterns of White People

Directions: review these common patterns:

a. Check-off any dynamics which you have observed or heard about.
b. Make a note next to the different dynamics that you have personally experienced, felt, thought, or done.
c. Reflect upon the unintended impact of these.

Some/Many Whites Tend to (consciously and unconsciously):

1. believe they have "earned" what they have, rather than acknowledge the extensive white privilege and unearned advantages they receive; believe that if people of color just worked harder...

2. not notice the daily indignities that people of color experience; deny them and rationalize them away with PLEs (perfectly logical explanations)

3. work to maintain the status quo and protect the advantages and privileges they receive

4. believe that white cultural norms, practices and values are superior and better

5. internalize the negative stereotypes about people of color and believe that whites are smarter and superior to people of color

6. want people of color to conform and assimilate to white cultural norms and practices

7. accept and feel safer around people of color who have assimilated and are "closer to white"

8. blame people of color for the barriers and challenges they experience; believe that if they "worked harder" they could "pull themselves up by their bootstraps"

9. believe that people of color are not competent and are only hired/promoted to fill quotas

10. interrupt and talk over people of color

11. resent taking direction from a person of color

12. dismiss and minimize frustrations of people of color and categorize the person raising issues as militant, angry, having an "attitude," working their agenda, not a team player...

13. focus on their "good intent" as whites, rather than on the negative impact of their behavior

14. focus on how much progress we have made, rather than on how much more needs to change

15. want people of color to "get over it" and move on quickly

16. get defensive when people of color express their frustrations with current organizational and societal dynamics

17. "walk on eggshells" and act more distant and formal with people of color

18. segregate themselves from people of color and rarely develop authentic relationships across race

19. exaggerate the level of intimacy they have with individual people of color

20. fear that they will be seen and "found out" as a racist, having racial prejudice

21. focus on themselves as an individual (I'm not racist; I'm a good white), and refuse to acknowledge the cultural and institutional racism people of color experience daily

22. pressure and punish whites who actively work to dismantle racism to conform and collude with white racism; criticize, gossip about, and find fault with white change agents

23. expect people of color to be the "diversity expert" and take the lead in raising and addressing racism as their "second (unpaid) job"

24. minimize, under-value, ignore, overlook and discount the talents, competencies and contributions of people of color

25. rephrase and reword the comments of people of color

26. assume the white teacher/coach/facilitator/employee, etc., is in charge/the leader; assume people of color are in service roles

27. rationalize away racist treatment of people of color as individual incidents or the result of something the person of color did/failed to do

28. dismiss the racist experiences of people of color with comments such as: That happens to me too...You're too sensitive...That happened because of _____, it has nothing to do with race!

29. judge a person of color as over-reacting and too emotional when they are responding to the cumulative impact of multiple recent racist incidents

30. accuse people of color of "playing the race card" whenever they challenge racist policies and practices; instead of exploring the probability of negative differential impact based on race, or that racist attitudes and beliefs are operating

31. if confronted by a person of color, shut down and focus on what to avoid saying or doing in the future, rather than engaging and learning from the interaction

32. look to people of color for direction, education, coaching on how to act and what not to do

33. compete with other whites to be "the good white:" the best ally, the one people of color let into their circle, etc.

34. if a white person makes a racist comment or action, aggressively confront them and pile on the feedback to distance from them and prove who is a better ally

35. seek approval, validation, and recognition from people of color

36. if confronted by a person of color, view it as an "attack" and focus on and critique HOW they engaged me, not my original comments or behaviors

37. disengage if feel any anxiety or discomfort

38. avoid confronting other whites on their racist attitudes and behaviors

39. when trying to help people of color, feel angry if they don't enthusiastically appreciate it

40. don't take any risks, don't show themselves, play it safe, stay silent when the topic is race

41. claim that we just don't have the time or budget to address racial equity

42. say they don't know anything about race because they grew up in a sheltered environment

43. complain that educational efforts on racism just make people afraid to "be themselves" (so its best not to engage)

44. *track patterns of differential treatment of people of color and intervene to stop inappropriate actions and educate others*

45. *continually learn more about the experiences of people of color and racism*

46. *recognize when people of color might be reacting out of cumulative impact, and offer space to talk about issues and their experiences*

47. *analyze policies and practices to assess any differential impact on people of color and intervene to create change*

48. *constantly track daily organizational activities to ensure fairness, respect, and inclusion for all people with respect to group dynamics, communication, task assignments, professional development opportunities, decision-making, conflict management, mentoring, networking.*

48. *seek to build authentic relationships with people of color; listen to them and believe their experiences*

The Joy of Unlearning Racism: What White People Have to Gain

Knowledge and Clarity

People gain information and perspectives that offer new lenses for viewing themselves and the world -- becoming more conscious, informed and insightful.

➢ Intellectual understanding-of other their own and other racial groups, of theories manifestations and dynamics of racism.
➢ Self-knowledge and awareness of own biases, culture, socialization, internalized superiority.

An Enriched Life

People live with greater meaning and purpose with a broader range of relationships and experiences.

➢ Engagement with issues they feel passionately about and that feel significant.
➢ Connections with a greater array of people, particularly people of color.
➢ Exposure to the cultures and wisdom of different racial groups.
➢ Improved relationships with other white people.

Authenticity and Greater Humanity

People feel more authentic within themselves, in their relationships, and in their lives.

➢ Expanded emotional capacities--greater compassion and feelings for and about other people.
➢ Less guarded, deeper, and more spontaneous relationships with people of color.
➢ Inner peace and spiritual integrity.

Empowerment, Confidence and Competence

A greater understanding of racism, a clearer sense of themselves, and more diverse relationships builds empowerment, confidence and competence to address racism and social justice issues.

➢ Less defensiveness--easier to admit their errors, learn from them and keep going.
➢ Greater competence and effectiveness educating others about racism and social justice issues.
➢ Improved ability to work with and serve people from other racial groups.
➢ Improved ability to work with others from dominant groups, whether the same or different from their own.
➢ Greater ability to be a role model/resource for other white people.
➢ Greater ability to be an effective ally, challenge racism and work for social justice.

Liberation and Healing

People experience this as transformative, freeing process that infuses their whole being and life.

➢ Fewer fears -- about what they'll find out about themselves, engaging with those who are different, doing or saying the wrong thing, offending others, or how their life would change for the worse.
➢ Healing from the myriad ways they are damaged psychologically, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually by living within a system of racial inequality and white supremacy.

Adapted from: Diane J. Goodman (2011). *Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups 2nd ed.*, Routledge.