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Helping White People See White: Creating a Social Movement

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Helping White People See White:

Creating a Social Movement

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Abstract

Whites benefit significantly from privilege economically, politically, and socially; yet, they also suffer because of it. Privilege affects the quality of life for all people living within a community and feeds the causal loop of systemic social injustice. These factors indicate the need for an intervention that raises awareness and educates Whites as to the negative effects and costs of privilege. An intervention using social media, as well as building partnerships with human service agencies, was designed to satisfy the recognized need. The intervention consists of educational posts to a Facebook page, which encourages readers to comment and participate in online discussions. Establishing partnerships with key municipal and social organizations ensures that educational messages are reinforced and the information is disseminated throughout the community. The Facebook page has been implemented and active with several views but few responses. This social media intervention can impact change at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels by improving relationships between individuals that will benefit communities, states, and the nation at large.

The dominant population (i.e. White people) recognizes that racism exists; yet, they are often blind to the largest contributor responsible for its continued presence in American society – White privilege (focus group, personal communication, November 3, 2013). Privilege is a well-established norm; in theory, it explains why Whites are ignorant to racial privilege and the advantages they inherit by way of their skin color (Brodkin, 2008; Guess, 2006; Kolchin, 2002; Lipsitz, 2006). Their lack of awareness contributes to the cultural myths and stereotyping that feeds the causal loop of racism, inequity, systemic imbalance, and social injustice (Guess, 2006; Kolchin, 2002; Lipsitz, 2006). The costs associated with privilege are not only damaging to people of color, but also Whites.

While the dominant population benefits significantly from privilege economically, politically, and socially, they also suffer because of it. For example, social supports are often funded through tax dollars. Consequently, if a community experiences an increase in demand on supports, it places a heavier economic burden on Whites because they are more likely to own homes and pay taxes. Homeownership for minorities is significantly lower: 50% for Hispanic, 47% for African Americans, compared to 68% for Whites (Karger & Stoesz, 2010). The Psychosocial Costs of Racism to Whites (PCRW) scale describes how Whites suffer emotionally (Spanierman, Todd, & Anderson, 2009). The costs and consequences surface as: White Empathy (feelings of sadness and anger about the existence of racism), White Guilt (remorse about race-based advantage), and/or White Fear (irrational fear and mistrust of racial minorities (Spanierman et al., 2009). Additionally, the dominant population suffers through loss of rich, meaningful relationships: they are disconnected from the benefits of sharing community with people of color.

For these reasons, there is a need to raise awareness among Whites as to the negative and pervasive effects of privilege. They need an increased understanding of the cost of racism to themselves and society in order for them to be able to identify and confront the systemic barriers that decrease the quality of life for everyone. Several theoretical frameworks support this need. General Systems Theory and Person-in-Environment (PIE) address how people are affected by the changes in their social environment and how the actions or changes by individuals or groups affect every other person and group in society (Lesser & Pope, 2011; Sheafor & Horejsi, 2008). When one group makes a change, either positively or negatively, the shift away from the current societal rule or pattern throws the system out of balance. The other groups or affected systems will strive to return to the previous state of normalcy (Lesser & Pope, 2011; Sheafor & Horejsi, 2008). This change and response cycle can account for the repetitive and continuous nature of systemic barriers and how they are codified into legislation. Whiteness Theory and White Identity Development Theory describe how race is socially, historically, and culturally constructed, and that the dominant population is culturally conditioned toward racial stereotypes and biases (Hartmann, Gerteis, & Croll, 2009; Lipsitz, 2006). This in turn affects their views and opinions of people of color and blinds them to privilege.

The assumptions behind these theories were used to inform and guide a social movement that targets the dominant population using social media. The intervention is aimed at raising awareness and helping Whites understand the costs of privilege—with the long-term goal of ending racism. Because 72% of Whites use social media (Pew Research Center, 2014) on a regular basis, it was selected as the method to implement this intervention in order to reach a large and diverse segment of the target population. The key outcomes expected from implementing this intervention are: increased acceptance of responsibility for maintaining

relationships in the community, and increased shared values for the community. These will be measured by: block groups that are maintained for six to twelve months post organization, shared leadership among several group members, professed common beliefs by community members, and acknowledgement of shared values by community members. Focus groups will provide feedback and status as to the progress and attainment of the desired outcomes.

In addition to the outcomes, there is an expectation the anti-racist network will strengthen by adding members. The anticipated growth is accounted for by the internalization stage of White Identity Development (Hardiman, 1982). This final stage of development represents the time when people bring their new identity into their everyday behavior and begin to participate in social justice activities (Hardiman, 1982). Therefore, as Whites are educated and their awareness increases, they may decide to take action in anti-racist activities or groups (Hardiman, 1982). Furthermore, additional benefits are expected from anti-racist activism. There is a potential for improved relationships in communities that see an increase in activism. It is conceivable these relationships would lead to decreased personal conflicts, decreased crime, and increased employment.

Finally, this intervention is substantiated by social work ethics. The social work profession values dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, and promotion of social justice for vulnerable populations (National Association of Social Workers [NASW] Code of Ethics, 2008). These values translate into ethical responsibilities social workers need to act upon when confronted with social issues—especially issues as pervasive as privilege and racism. Ethics call social workers to address environmental forces that decrease the quality of life for people, specifically vulnerable populations, on the micro, mezzo, and

macro levels (NASW, 2008). This social media intervention can impact all three levels by educating and raising awareness of privilege to Whites.

Intervention

The author recognizes the importance of taking action on social justice issues as espoused in the NASW Code of Ethics (2008). The issue of equity is particularly critical to address, if as a society, we are to move beyond the limitations we have created through systemic imbalances. White people created privilege and it is up to this population to change it. The intervention was created with this in mind. The intervention was designed with the purpose of raising awareness and educating Whites about the benefits and consequences of privilege. The author envisions this change taking place by creating a social movement that would result in bringing together enthusiastic allies that would educate other Whites in everyday situations (i.e. confronting microaggressions when they occur).

Consequently, the author is pursuing three areas in order to move the intervention forward (see Appendices A and B). The main thrust of activity is focused on social media. Social media is an online environment, which is familiar to many, and offers an open and encouraging space for people to learn and exchange ideas. In addition to social media, community partnerships are part of this intervention. The author is discussing a potential alliance between the University of Washington Tacoma (UWT) Diversity Resource Center (DRC) and the City of Tacoma Human Rights Commission with the hope that each organization's program will complement and strengthen the other, as well as reach a greater number of city residents. When implemented, these efforts will reach people on the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Social Media Example One - Facebook

Because 71% of online adults use Facebook (Pew Research Center, 2014), it was selected as the primary tool to use for raising awareness and educating Whites about the benefits and consequences of privilege. Facebook is well known and convenient; it allows users access at anytime and anyplace by computer, tablet, or mobile device. Pages can be created quickly and easily by anyone once an account is established. The author created the page titled Privilege—The Roadblock to Equity, which can be accessed at the following URL address: <http://https://www.facebook.com/awareofwhite> (see Appendix C).

Messages will be displayed, and additional communications will continue to be posted to the Facebook page a minimum of once a week. To date, the educational messages for the page have covered the topics of diversity, privilege, microaggressions, and sexual orientation. Similar content will be posted weekly. As relevant current issues arise in the media, these will be posted to the page in order to connect concepts with everyday events. For example, the question did privilege play a role in the recent trial involving Florida resident Michael Dunn (older white male) accused of murdering Jordan Davis (African American teenager) in 2012 was posted when the trial verdict was announced. Visitors and friends of the Facebook page will be encouraged to comment and engage in meaningful, respectful dialogue regarding these topics.

Social Media Example Two – Pinterest

The author created a Pinterest pin board as an alternative to Facebook. Pinterest is a visual form of social media where people post and share images. The idea behind developing this alternative was to offer people an artistic venue to comment on the cost of racism to Whites. By taking the time to select an image to share, it offered an opportunity for people to reflect on privilege and how it negatively affects their lives.

Social Media Example Three – Thought Provoking Messages

Thought provoking messages that invite introspection are meant to act as catalysts to change thoughts, perspectives, and behaviors. They are meant to simmer under the cognitive surface, enabling introspective moments, offering Whites the opportunity to consider their complicity with privilege. The idea is to acquire donated advertising space on Facebook and other websites where the dominant population will read these messages that are placed among the content on the web page. Once partnerships are established (e.g. United Way, Associated Ministries, etc.), these messages would be shared on the partner's website, in effect going viral. These messages will reflect similar content as to that being posted on Facebook. For example, a message addressing diversity would read, "People are like flowers; there are many different shapes and colors. The variety of cultures and colors adds interest to the bouquet. Bring color into *your* world." And a message challenging the status quo would read, "Conformity is like social constipation. It blocks the flow of ideas and limits society's potential." Messages like these and others will grant the reader an opportunity for reflection in privacy, offering safety to explore thoughts free from the fear of judgment by others in a social environment.

Partnerships

Another segment of the intervention involves pursuing social organizations in order to establish working partnerships. As mentioned, the first attempt at creating an alliance involves connecting the UWT DRC with the City of Tacoma. The organizations were selected to approach because they share similar goals and missions. The mission of the City of Tacoma Human Rights Commission communicates a commitment to the development of programs that foster diversity, providing residents with a city that is free of discrimination, bigotry, and prejudice (City of Tacoma Human Rights Commission, 2013). The City of Tacoma's mission

statement speaks to teamwork and partnerships with the community (City of Tacoma, 2013a). Partnerships are a component of the mission statement of the UWT, and the UWT DRC mission carries this further (University of Washington Tacoma, 2013; University of Washington Tri-Campus Advisory Committee, 2000). The UWT mission includes developing relationships with local agencies that share similar objectives as one of their top three goals (University of Washington Tacoma, 2013). The DRC mission includes providing programs that encourage the campus community to explore human differences and learn from them, which supports the City of Tacoma Human Rights Commission's mission (University of Washington Tacoma, 2013). Additional partnerships are envisioned such as with United Way and Associated Ministries.

Publicity

The primary objective of the marketing plan is to inform people about the existence of the Facebook page and generate enthusiasm to move them to participate, hence facilitating a social movement. Marketing will be accomplished using a mix of media tools. The Facebook page will be publicized with flyers that will invite people to visit and participate in online discussions. A flyer will be displayed throughout the UWT campus and also posted for viewing on the campus closed circuit televisions (CC TV). Business cards with the Facebook address will be distributed at the UWT Master of Social Work Capstone Fair and UWT DRC. As partners are added, posters and cards will be shared with the organizations in order to publicize the campaign with clients, visitors, and employees. Flyers will be distributed to local merchants for display on community bulletin boards assuring the marketing message is reaching an audience off campus. The cumulative effect of this effort will be increased exposure to the campaign, increased readership of the Facebook page, and growth of the anti-racist network—all of which lead to the end of racism.

Implementation and Results

Getting started with the intervention was easy. The author controlled the schedule around creating media and getting the necessary approvals to move onto the next steps. The difficulty came with building a level of interest and instilling a feeling of importance among others to take action. Many people visited the Facebook page, yet only two participants posted comments. The Pinterest page was a failure: nobody visited the page or posted images. The CC TV message was approved quickly but did not appear on the actual TV screens for days. Additionally, reaching the staff liaison for the commission at the City of Tacoma was easy enough to accomplish via email, but having an actual conversation by phone took two and a half weeks. It is understandable to expect implementing the partnership piece of the intervention would be difficult to accomplish. Coordinating people to fulfill this piece of the intervention compared to an individually focused task adds a layer of complexity, taking more time and effort.

The nominal level of participation by the public could be discouraging, and it is to some degree. It could lead one down the road of apathy and inaction. However, it bears recognizing that racism and equity are well-worn paths in society's consciousness. They are centuries old issues. When working to change systemic cultural issues like this, every achievement, no matter how large or small, must be celebrated as a success in order to maintain momentum. In the case of this intervention, what has been achieved to date is positive. In just three weeks, 41 people visited and liked the page. And the message has been carried outside the United States—one visitor lives in England. Every person that views the Facebook page is one who can carry the message forward. They can share the information with others. At the very least, they can lead by example if the information they take away changes their behavior. Also, while developing

this intervention, the author discussed ideas with fellow social workers. This generated meaningful conversations about White privilege that would otherwise have not taken place. Each of these instances illustrates one small step toward raising awareness and changing perspectives—indicating progress in the movement toward anti-racism.

Why Continue?

Without this intervention, and without continual efforts however slow they may be to produce results, the forces of privilege will continue to override social justice and erode the dignity and worth of individuals. Change takes place one person at a time, and a social movement grows one person at a time. For instance, abolitionist John Brown believed in change. He, and others like him, worked to end the most prominent form of White privilege—slavery (PBS Online, n.d.). Historically, several presidents such as Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson worked and implemented legislation to neutralize racial imbalances caused by privilege. Tim Wise leads today's anti-racist movement (Wise, n.d.). Without him and his dream for racial equity, many Whites would not know about privilege. If change is to occur, people must take action, regardless of the initial prognosis or expected outcome. We do not know where the path will lead, as evidenced by those referenced here.

It is important to continue the anti-racist effort and dialogue, even when faced with apathy and adversity. His Holiness the Dalai Lama (1998) discusses overcoming obstacles and bringing about change in *The Art of Happiness*. Learning and creating awareness are mentioned as the first steps toward change. The momentum these actions generate lead to determination and guide one to take action. However, even when people recognize they want change, they may avoid taking steps toward it because of internal resistance or procrastination. The Dalai Lama (1998) suggests that by keeping the message alive through “constant familiarity” (p. 225) new

patterns of thought and behavior can be established. And finally, navigating difficulties and balancing expectations must be considered. Change is a gradual process, and even more so when considering racism. Patience is needed when considering the amount of time and effort it will take to correct a social issue of this magnitude, and setting realistic expectations will help avoid disappointment (His Holiness the Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998). This writer holds these thoughts and examples as sources of inspiration and motivation to continue on in light of the overwhelming odds and sluggish responses to current undertakings (see Appendix D).

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Appendix A

Creating a Social Movement

Action/Task	Intended Purpose for Action/Task	Due Date	Status
Create Facebook Page	Educate, Raise Awareness, Increase Anti-racist Network	2/07/14	Done
Postings to Facebook Page focusing on topics of privilege, diversity, microaggressions, etc.	Attract participation/conversation on Facebook page to raise awareness re: topic of the week.	A minimum of 1x/week	In Progress
Create Pinterest Page	Invite participants to visually comment on the cost of racism to Whites. Provides an alternative medium for people to participate and become introspective regarding White privilege.	1/17/14	Done
Business Cards for Diversity Summit	Publicize Facebook Page	2/28/14	Done
Create Business Card	Marketing tool	2/12/14	Done
Advertise Facebook Page to UWT Students, faculty, and staff			
Create messages to post on social media and partnership websites	Thought provoking messages that will cause introspective thinking among Whites regarding privilege and its costs to Whites and people of color	2/07/14	Done
White Identity Development Theory Handout for Diversity Summit, MSW Capstone Fair, etc.	An educational tool inviting Whites to evaluate their current stage of development, explaining how they can evolve into the next stage, creating opportunity for change and growth, with the intent to build anti-racist allies.	2/28/14	Done
Solicit social media organizations	Social media organizations to donate space for thought provoking messages	3/31/14	Not Done
Develop partnership between City of Tacoma and UWT Diversity Resource Center	Foster an alliance between the city and university. Alliance will strengthen each organization's anti-racist programs and benefit the surrounding community.	3/31/14	In Progress

Action/Task	Intended Purpose for Action/Task	Due Date	Status
Collaborate with UWT Diversity Resource Center Director	Publicity and campaign suggestions, space to publicize campaign at UWT Diversity Summit, potential partnership with city	2/7/14	Done
Collaborate with Human Rights Manager	Referral and contact information for the appropriate city commission to meet with UWT Diversity Resource Center	2/28/14	In Progress
Partner with other human service organizations (e.g. United Way, Associated Ministries)	Increase the breadth of the social media campaign by posting thought provoking messages to organizations' websites, building allies, and growing the anti-racist network.	12/31/14	Not Done
Attend pertinent community events	Share identity development information, encourage participation with Facebook, Pinterest and partner websites in order to build allies and grow the anti-racist network.	12/31/14	Not Done

Appendix B

Activity Log

<u>Date</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Result</u>
1/17/14	Set up Pinterest site, sent request to Facebook friends to pin images to Pinterest depicting what the cost of racism to Whites looks like	No responses/postings to Pinterest as of 2/14/14
1/17/14	Individual meetings with two social work professors regarding Capstone project and social media campaign	Referrals to IAS professor re: social marketing and UWT Diversity Resource Center Director
1/17/14	Created Pinterest Page - asking people to pin images representing the cost of racism to Whites	2 followers but no pins posted as of 2/17/14
1/19/14	Sent message via Facebook asking, What's the cost of racism to Whites? Asked for "friends" to post to their News Feed.	4 people have shared message on their FB pages, so far only one response to the query.
1/24/14	Met with Diversity Resource Center Director	Ideas/suggestions for social media campaign, advice re: creating an open atmosphere on Facebook page to encourage participation, and other referrals to other information resources (e.g. Peggy McIntosh and Jane Elliott)
1/24/14	Met with social work professor regarding social media campaign and reaching out to community (i.e. City of Tacoma)	Ideas/suggestions to facilitate collaboration between UWT Stomp It Out Campaign and City of Tacoma
1/27/14	Met with IAS professor regarding social marketing	Suggestions and information that will contribute to successful social media campaign messages in order to create change
2/6/14	Facebook page posted - https://www.facebook.com/awareofwhite	Status - 32 likes as of 2/7/14; 2 Friends Shared page; 1 additional posting, no participation as in typed responses
2/6/14	Created business card to publicize Facebook page	Proof of card ready to share for feedback
2/6/14	Solicited feedback from cohort member re: business card design	Suggestions received 2/7/14 to make card reader friendly
2/7/14	Meeting with Diversity Resource Center Director re: potential partnership between UWT and City of Tacoma	DRC Director to meet with Assistant Chancellor for Equity and Diversity re: any existing programs/alliances between UWT DRC and City of Tacoma; Director to check UWT List Serve for any City of Tacoma staff members are receiving DRC posts; Author to contact City of Tacoma for information and details pertinent to partnership (i.e. learn process/steps, which commission, and person to contact).
2/7/14	Ordered business cards	Order arrived 2/12/14
2/10/14	Email to City of Tacoma Staff Liaison re: process/protocol engaging in conversation with appropriate board/commission at City of Tacoma and UWT DRC	Response from Staff Liaison to call and continue discussion by phone. Liaison is willing to help advance the Capstone project if possible.
2/10/14	Posting #2 to Facebook page	15 views, no responses

2/13/14	Posting #3 to Facebook page	16 views, no responses
2/13/14	Called City of Tacoma Staff Liaison	Left voicemail
2/14/14	Called City of Tacoma Staff Liaison	Left voicemail
2/14/14	Visited UWT Copy Services for help enlarging business card for campus flyer and campus TV advertising	Successfully acquired image to use for creating flyer and TV advertisement
2/14/14	Created campus flyer and JPEG file for campus TV advertising. Both files submitted to UWT Student Involvement for approval.	Awaiting response from student involvement
2/14/14	Updated Facebook page with business card image for easy identification and minimize confusion for people visiting the site off the business card	6 new viewers visited page; 40 likes as of 2/17/14
2/17/14	Posting #4 to Facebook	19 views, 1 like
2/18/14	Student Involvement approved flyers for campus and CC TV posting	Sent flyer to UWT copy center for printing
2/19/14	Posting #5 to Facebook	12 views, 1 post/response
2/20/14	Called City of Tacoma Staff Liaison	Left voicemail
2/21/14	Flyers available for pick up from Copy Center	Flyers posted on campus
2/23/14	Posting #6 to Facebook page	11 views
2/24/14	Request sent to UWT Social Work office to share Facebook address with BASW and Criminal Justice students	28% increase from previous week people who saw posting. Increased likes by 4; one visitor posted a message
2/27/14	Posting #5 & 6 to Facebook	15 people saw postings within 2 hours of posting
2/27/14	Called City of Tacoma Staff Liaison	Left voicemail; Call returned and conversation took place; next step coordinate meeting between DRC Director and City of Tacoma.
3/3/14	Meeting request sent to Assistant Chancellor for Equity and Diversity and DRC Director to discuss meeting with City of Tacoma	

Appendix C

Social Media Example 1 - Facebook



Making Whiteness Visible **To raise awareness**
 February 6 near Tacoma, WA

Welcome to a conversation focused on exploring views and challenging myths about race and stereotypes. The intent of the conversation is to unite our community and end the divisive effects of racism.

Like · Comment · Share

Making Whiteness Visible **To raise awareness** shared a link.
 February 13 near Tacoma, WA

After watching this brief video, let us know if you have noticed/observed microaggressions this week? Were you familiar with microaggressions before watching the video?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJL2P0JsAS4>



Microaggressions in Everyday Life
www.youtube.com

Bestselling author Derald Wing Sue explains what a microaggression is, how it manifests itself, how it impacts people, and what can be...

Like · Comment · Share

18 people saw this post

Making Whiteness Visible **To raise awareness**
 February 6 near Tacoma, WA

Everyone is diverse. Diversity is not limited to people of color. Whites are equally diverse. Diversity is reflected through nationality, age, class, race, gender, religion, ability/disability, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Take a minute to consider your heritage, recognize the many aspects that contribute to your identity and share what you come up with!

Like · Comment · Share

Appendix D

NEVER GIVE UP□

No matter what is going on

Never give up□

Develop the heart□

Too much energy in your country□ is spent developing the mind□ instead of the heart□

Be compassionate□

Not just to your friends□

But to everyone□

Be compassionate□

Work for peace□

In your heart and in the world□

Work for peace□

And I say again□

Never give up□

No matter what is going on around you□

Never give up — Dalai Lama XIV (Goodreads, 2014)