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Using Privilege to Dismantle Privilege:

Stories from Anti-Racism Work and Other Liberation Struggles Through the Eyes of a Middle Class, White Man

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Abstract

This paper is part of a Course-Linked Capstone with *Training Design for Experiential Learning* and *Training for Social Action.* The primary reason why I chose to pursue a Course-Linked Capstone with these courses is because of the depth of learning I experienced while at SIT and the continuation of this learning into my Reflective Practice Phase. These courses were instrumental in my learning about myself as well as about the importance of experiential learning in relation to training and facilitation.

Because of my particular experience at the SIT Graduate Institute, I cannot detach training and facilitation from understanding of my own identity. While I was in these training courses, I was also enrolled in courses entitled *Social Identity* and *Theory and Practice of Social Justice.* As a result, my work as a trainer has been focused around social identity and social justice issues. I facilitated workshops at SIT around issues including white privilege, racial identity and social justice activism.

Due to the fact that my understanding of training is wrapped up into an analysis of my own social identity (especially my racial identity) this paper is about my experience as a trainer and what insights I have gained into understanding myself (and my different social identities) as well as myself as a trainer. One of the key insights I have gained into learning about myself both as a trainer and as a white man is seeing myself in others. This will be expanded upon later in the paper.

Key words/terms: white privilege, co-creating learning environments, culture circles, racial identity development, experiential learning, white silence

An appreciation

My studies and work after leaving SIT led me south, to North Carolina. It is only because of my dear friend and classmate, Bevelyn Ukah, that I have had the opportunity to do this. I thank you Bevelyn and appreciate you so much as a friend, colleague and a revolutionary who I look up and appreciate more than words can describe.

I wish to dedicate this paper and my year at Guilford College to all of those who have allowed me to survive and thrive in Greensboro over the past 10 months. I have been loved, supported, challenged, and nourished during my journey and personal transformation. This transformation would not have been possible without my community from SIT, those people who looked after me in Vermont. Without you all I would never have made it to Greensboro in the first place. To my friends and family who were with me in Brattleboro, I thank and appreciate you very much.

I am grateful everyday for your support and love and will forever cherish our relationships.

My feelings and gratitude for my communities in Greensboro and Brattleboro are best captured in the words of Assata Shakur:

One of the best things about struggling is the people you meet. Before I became involved, I never dreamed such beautiful people existed. Of course, there were some creeps, but I can say without the slightest hesitation that I have been blessed with meeting some of the kindest, most courageous, most principled, most informed and intelligent people on the face of the earth. I owe a great deal to those who have helped me, loved me, taught me, and pulled my coast when I was moving in the wrong direction. If there is such a thing as luck, I've had an abundance of it, and the ones who have brought it to me are my friends and comrades. My wild, big-hearted friends, with their pretty ways and pretty thoughts, have given me more happiness than I will ever deserve. There was never a time, no matter what horrible thing I was undergoing, when I felt completely alone.

Assata Shakur
Assata: An Autobiography (1987)

My life, my learning, my experience, my awareness, and my spirit would not be what it is without you. I carry love, learning, challenges, and nourishment from all of you with me always.

Introduction

Upon entering the School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute, I was another bright eyed, middle class, white student who was ready to go out into "the world" and help save it. My application for the Peace Corps was nearly finalized and I was ready to learn about how to I might best spread "freedom" and "development." I was going to "be the change I want to see in the world."[*] Soon after arriving on campus, I realized that my journey would take me to a much different place.

Some of my first conversations at SIT were about privilege. While this term has many different definitions, I would like to use the words of Peggy McIntosh. She describes privilege as such:

> I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets, which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks (McIntosh 1988, p. 1).

As an undergraduate student, I started realize what my male and heterosexual privilege looked like. Some of the things that my female identifying and queer friends had to deal with on an almost daily basis were things that never even came into my mind. My free usage of words like *slut* hadn't even registered as being wrong, or as being part of the systemic oppression that women face everyday. My friends in college introduced me to the idea of social justice and privilege and I cannot thank them enough.

These experiences informed so much of the time I spent working after graduation. My relationships were based on the foundation that as a male identified person, I would

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[*] This common quotation from Mahatma Gandhi is one used over and over again at SIT. Although I understand its importance conceptually, I feel as though the phrase isn't often applied in the way Gandhi meant it when he said it, in my experience.

always carry certain advantages that others did not. As a predominately white institution,

(PWI) Hobart and William Smith Colleges did not do an adequate job educating me on

my own racial privilege. I also must take responsibility because there were opportunities

for me to understand my own white privilege that I didn't take advantage of as well.

Given this lack of experience talking about my white identity coupled with the

fact that I had some sense of the social construction of identity and the systems of

oppression and privilege that come along with it, it is no surprise that first learning the

term white privilege (as a 26 year old graduate student) shook me deep to my core. *How

could I have never really thought of something that was such a big part of my identity

and experience? How could I understand the idea of privilege, if I didn't know how I

lived it everyday as a white person?* Questions like these sent me reeling and put me in

deep reflective spaces. They also allowed me to understand what my community looked

like and why it looked that way.

Because this paper is so tied into identity and privilege, it is important to name the

ways I identify and how privilege is attached to those identities. Here are a few of my

social identities:

White	US citizen	Able-bodied/hearing
Middle class	Male	College education

These identities are all privileged in the US cultural and social context. Although the

focus of this paper will be heavily on race and whiteness, it is important to recognize that

I experience my whiteness through a male, middle class lens and this is crucial for

understanding my own experience.

It is important to note that the connections between my experience at SIT and

during my Reflective Practice Phase emerged from learning that occurred in the

classroom in Vermont. This is a Course-Linked Capstone with *Training Design for Experiential Learning* and *Training for Social Action*. These courses informed my experience and allowed me to understand my own social identities in profound ways. Although these courses were important for my growth and learning, other courses including *Social Identity and Theory and Practice of Social Justice* also played a major role in my experience. Because of the connection between training and social identity this paper is intended to show insights that I have gained both as a white man and as a trainer. More importantly, it should also demonstrate how these things (my social identity and my identity as a trainer) cannot be detached from one another and they inform each other.

This paper is an attempt to bring theory and practice together through reflection on a year of work in the field. I have been working as a graduate intern in the Multicultural Education Department (MED) at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina. My work has been to organize, facilitate, support and in any way assist in the operations and learning that take place within the MED throughout the entire year. Even with a staff of only 3 permanent positions (4 people including myself) the MED has lofty and difficult goals to attain:

> 1. Retain traditionally under-represented populations by enhancing their educational, spiritual, cultural, physical and emotional development.
> 2. Increase leadership and professional development among Guilford College's student population.
> 3. Excel at transformative education and the creation of a multicultural, anti-racist environment at Guilford College.

My role was primarily involved with goals 1 and 2, however I also attended meetings and helped frame some of the conversation around institutionalizing anti-racism on campus.

My reflections are from my own personal experience. This is what I mean to say with the sub-title of this paper: 'from the perspective of a middle class white man.' I

understand that spaces like these on campuses of PWIs have been so important for the retention and growth of students of color and queer students in many different parts of the country. As a white man, this is something that I needed to keep in the front of my mind at all times while doing this work.

This paper contains much of my personal story connected to identity and training. Because of the reflective nature of this research, I will be referring to my experience often. Though a mix of theory and lived experience is the goal, I realize that these things are not usually contained in the same space. Historically, this serves to limit the capacity of both the theories (as they are not personalized) and the personal narratives (because they may not be taken seriously without a conceptual grounding). This is an attempt to reach some balance between theoretical constructs that can be strengthened through personalized lived experience as a means to better understand what the theories mean and why they are important.

The first part of this paper deals with defining race and racial identity development. These are crucial to understanding my experience due to the heavy focus on whiteness that I was working with. I was the facilitator of the regular white caucus meetings on campus (that came out of the anti-racism workshop in September) as well as a staff person who could talk to white people about their process and racial identity development. Because of this it is important to understand terms like racial identity development and race. Also, I was brought into the MED in order to be a facilitator, so in this section I have some discussion on the definition of cross-cultural training.

I would also acknowledge that the racial identity development models discussed in this paper are linear and that is not necessarily the way I view personal growth and

transformation. To some extent I believe that I am constantly in flux between different stages and even having one foot in two or three different stages at one time. Because of this we must understand these theories and their importance through the lens of these limitations. They should be guiding models, applied loosely to actual lived experience.

Secondly, I will discuss the nature of white people talking about race and working toward an anti-racist world. This not only means personal experience and growth as a self-identified white anti-racist person, but it also means organizing politically in our communities and bringing the conversation of anti-racism out in the open, even in times when it might require a sacrifice on our part. This section will include theories from training courses at SIT such as culture circles, experiential learning and co-creating learning environments.

Lastly, I will go through more theory related to training and give insights into what my year has looked like at Guilford College from a trainer lens. Insights into internalizing the experiential learning cycle, co-creating learning environments and training styles have all played important parts in my learning throughout this year and before. The first time I was introduced to these concepts was in the *Training Design for Experiential Learning* course at SIT during the Fall 2011 semester. These and many other concepts were brought out through class discussion as well as through designing, implementing and evaluating workshops both in the classroom and outside. Learning from these concepts (and relating them to my own experience) was deepened in the *Training for Social Action* course during the Spring 2012 semester. Also, in this section I discuss part of my process (and insights gained from that process) of how my identity influenced my experience and my work as a trainer.

Contextualizing my Reflective Practice Phase

In order to understand the depth of my learning from this year as well as the analysis of racial identity (for me personally, the institution of Guilford and broader societal trends) it is important to have some kind of context for where I was working and what my work looked like.

The Society of Friends founded Guilford College in 1837. Historically, the college has prided itself on its Quaker values including diversity, justice and community. However, it was not until 1962 that Guilford started enrolling Black students. They were one of the last Quaker colleges in the US to do so.

The Multicultural Education Department (MED) at Guilford College was founded because historically, Black students have not had the same access, representation and support on campus since the college was integrated in 1962, which was the same year as the University of Mississippi (which was forced to desegregate by various court rulings and the presence of US Marshals). On October 18, 1968, Brothers and Sisters in Blackness (BASIB) was founded. According to *The Guilfordian*[1] (1969) BASIB was founded in order for "Black students to maintain an identity within themselves, and to enlighten Black students and others on the role of the Black [*sic*] in society and on his significance in history". The necessity for a group like BASIB is easily understood. In an institution (and a society) where your existence is that of a second-class citizen, Black people needed to (and still need to) create spaces for exploration of their own identity and to unite in the struggle against white racial domination.

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[1] Guilford College's student newspaper

Throughout the beginning of their formation, BASIB had numerous requests for the Black students on campus, according to Jean Parvin (1969) a staff writer for the Guilfordian. Among these requests were: "Afro-American history taught by a Black professor (giving Black students first priority in taking the course); a course in Black literature and writing, and a course in African art; full-time Black professors and counselors, more financial aid for all students and an increase in the college activities program" (p. 4). These requests are echoed in the experiences of students of color on Guilford's campus today, nearly 45 years later. In the MED students regularly talk about the lack of representation of people or color in staff (with the exception of cleaning and food services) and faculty.[2] Additionally, there is regular conversation about the lack of non-Athlete Black males. One Black male student claimed, "When I got to campus I only knew of one other Black man who was not an athlete." Obviously this is only the opinion of one student, but it paints a picture of the experience of students of color at Guilford.

Some of the demands of BASIB were met and the space where they organized eventually came to be known as the MED. Although the mission of the MED is beyond what BASIB was trying to do, it is important to keep in mind that the legacy of this department stems from the experience of the first Black students on campus.

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[2] Institutional data from Guilford College for the year 2012-2013 shows Black representation on staff at 18% and faculty at 5%. To contextualize these percentages, 40.6% of people living in the city of Greensboro identified as Black in 2010. (US Census 2010 http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37/3728000.html).

Life as an MED Staff Person – Everyday Trainer

I understand that my experience as a white man working in multicultural affairs cannot be captured in any paper, as the breadth and depth of what I have experienced cannot be contained by one document. Also, I want to acknowledge the overlap between my work as a staff person in the MED and my work as a trainer. I view myself as a trainer/facilitator in any of the conversations I was engaged in on a daily basis. Because I didn't have an office, I often times sat in the lobby of the MED where students, other staff, faculty, alumni/a and other community members would come to see Jorge, Jada (the two directors of the office) or Parker (the LGBTQQA coordinator). Later in the year they came to see me too! My point in saying all of this is that while formally I really only facilitated 4 workshops the entire year (and the white caucus every week), everyday I was involved as a facilitator and participant for learning happening right in front of my face. Another reflection adds some context to my work and my thinking during this time. This particular quotation was from something I wrote on February 26, 2013:

My lens of understanding facilitation as my work here was a selfish and self-centered one. I viewed my own individual work as work that only I should be concerned with, as work that I was producing and therefore should have some kind of say over. What started to shift within me was the very fact that I would not be able to be in this office, that I would not have the jobs that I had, and that I surely would not have had the chance to come to Greensboro, explore my own identity and get to know a new place, without the community that had built the MED, that had created the positions and connections on campus that I was a part of and benefiting from. I viewed my experience from the practicum lens at SIT. This is something that I need in order to graduate and my understanding of training is clear to me, and this is not it. Well, I have some updates on that front.

Training and facilitation are not only conversations. They are not only workshops with flipcharts and butcher paper. They are not limited to the 3-hour conversations about privilege and identity that I am used to being involved in at SIT. Facilitation literally means to make an action or a process easier. Under this definition I have been facilitating learning around anti-racism and anti-oppression since coming to Guilford College at the end of August. From the smallest (or perceived smallest) task, to the actual facilitation of a workshop, I have been doing many different things. I was responsible for checking out two of the movies for the anti-racism workshop. I brought the supplies from the office to the workshop space. I created and printed the sign-in sheets for participants at the workshop and made sure nametags and markers were available to everyone. For the workshop in February, I was responsible for printing evaluations

and the resource booklets for all participants. I am not listing these things to give myself value, but rather trying to point out how if I was not completing these tasks, then someone else would have done it, but that would mean they had less time/energy to do other tasks required of them. I guess the point I am trying to get across is, it doesn't matter who does these things as long as they are done in a timely matter so that the workshop can happen and be effective for people. My involvement is not necessary but in this sense helps facilitate learning in a way that we do not commonly think of the word facilitate.

I believe that this definition and understanding of facilitation is important in order to understand deeper concepts in this paper. I would love for readers to understand that training in this context is not just me getting hired to design and implement workshops, but rather working to facilitate conversations and support students struggling with their experience on campus. Outside of struggle, students often came to share positive experiences and victories as well. I remember many conversations with the student who started the Queer People of Color (QPOC) group. There were difficulties and obstacles, but in the end it was such a beautiful and necessary piece of the conversation that was missing. Even when I was participating in these conversations, I was still in a training (and as a result, was honing my own skills as a trainer). Please keep this in mind, as training can mean very different things. My experience, with the idea of training during this past year, was very wide and deep. As a result it is difficult for me to see where my experience as a staff person ends and as a trainer begins.

I would also like to add in this section a discussion about just how important people of color and queer people have been in my life these past 10 months. I don't want to generalize or stereotype, but I will say that the majority of people that come through the MED are people of color and people identifying as queer. My relationships with certain people in the MED have deepened my understanding of the world greatly and I would not be able to have the analysis that I do without all of the many people teaching me along the way. Again, I don't want to make it sound like these relationships have

been completely one-sided or imbalanced. I am privileged, but I still have love to give

and I still share my perspective with my closest friends, in an effort to create mutually

beneficial learning environments and relationships.

It seems as though a reflection of mine from November 2012 is important and

relevant to share at this point (the names of my friends are not included in this work. For

the sake of context, all of the people mentioned in this story are students identifying as

Black, ranging in age from 20 to 60 years old). This is not an appendix, it is not an

afterthought—I am able to understand my own privilege the way I do primarily not

because of the white people in my life, but rather because of the relationships that I have

built with people of color and queer people[3] together and the ideas, thoughts and opinions

that have been absent from my life for so long, finally coming into my experience.

Friday was a day I remember because of where I was sitting and who came to sit with me. In the morning Person A came in to speak with me, and I was so elated. Although I had some work to do, we engaged in a conversation for about 45 minutes. She asked about me about my experiences, and I was happy to go back in time and give her some of my history. After speaking with Person A, Persons B and C came to sit down with me from mid-morning through lunch. I had lunch with Person D, and then after lunch spent some time with Person E. I have realized over these past couple months that I have not had enough exposure to Black people in my life before coming to Guilford. Yes, my best friends at SIT were Black women, and that was really important for my personal development as well as trying to grow into an actively anti-racist person. Spending most of Friday with Black people got me thinking about my past, and why I might not have had very close Black friends while I was growing up, and even into college.

I have always viewed myself as an open-minded and flexible person, when it comes to my beliefs. Yes, I sincerely believe the things I support and the ideology I publish everyday, however, I try to never be closed to new ideas, or opposing ideologies (sometimes this is very difficult, but I am working on it). I try to not place blame on anyone as far as this lack of racial diversity in my friendships is concerned but that is hard. When looking back often times I also realize that the friends of color I did have growing up were so indoctrinated into whiteness that it was hard to see the pride they had in their own identity. My best friend growing up was half-Indian. My first girlfriend (who I was together with for nearly 6 years) was part-Puerto Rican. But still, my life was filled mostly with white people.

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[3] I do not wish to dichotomize or separate these things. We all operate at the intersection of many different social identities. My closest queer friends, who are also people of color, influenced so much of my experience. It is not a dichotomous label, but rather I am trying to speak to people identifying either as queer, a person of color, or both.

Being able to spend so much time in the MED, and be around predominantly Black and Brown people has allowed me to realize my own history and the ways in which it is so easy for young white people to claim open-mindedness, while at the same time propping up white supremacy. This will not be the end of this thinking, as I need to think about ways in which this experience is concretely changing me. Here are a few I can think of:

-My first reactions to stories are typically to listen and to take the person who is speaking seriously, and believe their experience to be valid. Not that I ever did this consciously (or outwardly) before, I was raised in the "you work for everything you have, and there is never an excuse for failing" worldview. Because of this socialization, initial reactions from myself would be to downplay the experience of the person talking to me. I don't think in those moments I ever realized that this was happening. Honestly, I don't think I realized that I did this until coming to SIT and beginning deep conversations about race and social identity along with the nature of privilege and oppression. These reactions are quickly being rooted out, and it is mostly through forming relationships and understanding where people come from.

-Intimidation: although I will admit to being intimidated by certain people of color in my past, particularly Black women, I am coming to understand that these judgments were not mine, rather they were what society was telling me to think. Telling me how to react. I don't feel this intimidation boiling inside of me anymore. I feel loved, supported and cared for, by many Black women in my life and I am so happy to know all of them, and so happy they have allowed me into their lives as well. My sincerest hope (as well as a deep anxiety) is that I can give pieces of myself and support those individuals in my community that have taught me and continue to teach me so much on a daily basis. I am blessed to have all of the relationships that I have in my life.

-White male supremacy: I understand that I may never be able to escape these systems completely, as I am fundamentally a part of them, however I can see the values, ideas and internal mechanisms slowly eroding in the face of loving and supportive Black women who are invested in me and who appreciate my investment in them. I would not be able to do the type of self-reflection and internal and external analysis that I am constantly doing, if it were not for the Black women in my life (I don't want to narrow it down and say that it is only Black women, who have influenced me, but rather show that these women have had a profound impact on me, and our social identities have been important pieces of those relationships). Race and gender domination work so closely together, that it is impossible to separate when one is being racist and patriarchical. Because we have developed such strong bonds, I believe these relationships have been some of the most meaningful of my entire life.

Although this seems like it is more of a reflection on the whole year (and in some way it is) this particular day crystallized a lot of these thoughts and allowed me to think about it deeply because of the people I spoke with and the thinking that came out of those conversations.

As a part of Training for Social Action, we wrote *changeviews*. These were basically our views on change, whether it was personal change, social change or any other conception of this idea. Described above are reflections on how I was undergoing personal change while simultaneously participating in social change. Yes, these realizations came, as I

was an organizer working in multiculturalism, a field in which we are trying to raise awareness for the need for social change. So much of my experience has been the idea that this social change is wrapped up in personal attitudes, ideas and behaviors and that until we change these, we will not even understand what a term like social change means.

The description of my learning in the reflections above demonstrates an insight into this work I have learned: that as I come to understand myself better, I will come to understand what my role in social change is better as well. We tend to dichotomize these types of change and view them as separate from one another. What my learning at Guilford has allowed me to see is that there is no social change without personal transformation, and that this personal transformation is often times the spark for broader movements of social change. One cannot exist without the other. So much of what I describe in this paper is related to this point.

My sense of value and the value of my labor in the office is tied in directly to understanding the connection between personal transformation and social change. As I came to understand it (which was contrary to the ideas I had developed through social conditioning), my role in understanding my own privilege (and how this played out in my work) would be crucial if I were to be a part of any social change movement. Initially, I felt as though my labor wasn't being valued enough based on my skills and experiences. After some reflection and conversations with colleagues, I realized that my role should be one of working behind the scenes (based on my identity and my relation to the history of the space I was working in) and that this would be a way for me to understand what I needed to do personally and how I might be a part of larger movements for social change.

Training and Identity

As this paper will be a guide to training and facilitation in spaces where multiculturalism, social identity and social justice are being discussed and analyzed, it is important to start with an analysis describing connections between our social identities and training. Of course this will be a theme throughout this entire paper, but I must define certain terms and try to understand this connection in concrete ways before diving deeper. While I acknowledge that I have gained insights from my experience working at Guilford College as a trainer, these insights cannot be detached from my reality as a white man (among other identities).

Due to the fact that I will be looking deeply at race and racial identity it is crucial to first have an understanding of where this idea of race comes from, and how this lines up with my socialization about race. So, I will do a short historical and social analysis around the term race, and then I will share some reflections about how I came to understand myself as a white person.

In order to more deeply understand these connections I will then take a look at racial identity development models. Although these models are conceptually based and therefore not exactly in line with lived experience, they are important to understand some foundation for what different patterns and themes might be present in understanding racial identity, in particular white racial identity.

What is Race? How was it created?

Theories about race and racial identity have been around for a long time. The first time that the word 'race' was used in the English language was not until the 16th

century (*Race: The Power of an Illusion*). It is widely believed that during the times of European "exploration" and expansion that people in the New World were often times defined by their country or land of origin, rather than their racial identity. The article *Historical Perspective on Racism*, from the *Social Identity* coursepack describes the first use of the word white in reference to a racial identity: "The term 'white' was not created until after 1676 when European indentured servants and Africans almost overthrew the wealthy colonial elite during Bacon's Rebellion" (Williams 2011, p. 25). This is a significant fact of history, as we are generally socialized into believing that race is a scientific and therefore inherently innate idea. If we were alive before the 1670s, people would not understand what the term, "the white race" meant.

Prior to Bacon's rebellion, people in North America were separated based primarily on class and socio-economic status. Although skin color was a factor, there was still much social interaction between Blacks and whites of similar economic positions. Howard Zinn (1999) describes it in *A People's History of the United States,* "Black and white worked together, fraternized together. The very fact that laws had to be passed after a while to forbid such relations indicates the strength of that tendency" (p. 31). Laws were passed in Virginia that criminalized white people for marrying anyone who wasn't white and penalizing white people more for running away with people of color. Early in the construction of race we can see the antagonism between whiteness and Blackness created by social conditioning and legal policy (Zinn 1999, p. 32)

Bacon's Rebellion was unique and influential because it involved a mixed-race group of poor people, joining together, in an attempt to overthrow the status quo (Zinn 1999, p. 33). As a result, racial categories were more tightly defined and certain rights

and allowances taken away from Africans coming to the continent, and other privileges given to whites, of any class or economic status.

An example of this occurred in colonial Virginia. In 1640, an African man named John Punch escaped his servitude with two other European men. All three were caught and punished. Howard Zinn (1999) describes the ruling of the court at the time: "…two whites were punished with a lengthening of their service. But, as the court put it, 'the third being a negro named John Punch shall serve his master or his assigns for the time of his natural life'"(p. 30). It is clear that from the very beginning of the African experience on this continent that Black people have been viewed as less than human. As a result, the space for "humans" has been created solely for white people. This is where the idea of white privilege starts to emerge. As a white person, even in 1680, I could more closely define myself as a human being (no matter my class status) compared to someone from Africa in North America during the same time period.

Race and racial identity became even more concretely defined around the time of Bacon's Rebellion. As a result of rebellions like this one, the ruling class needed to find a way to keep working class Blacks and whites in competition and opposed to one another. One way they did this was to continue treating Africans as property and not allowing many of them a path to freedom. Another way was to give material benefits to freed white people in an effort to clearly delineate white from Black:

> Virginia's ruling class, having proclaimed that all white men were superior to Black, went on to offer their social (but white) inferiors a number of benefits previously denied them. In 1705 a law was passed requiring masters to provide white servants whose indenture time was up with ten bushels of corn, thirty shillings, and a gun, while women servants were to get 15 bushels of corn and forty shillings. Also, the newly freed servants were to get 50 acres of land (Zinn 1999, p. 36).

This history is crucial to understanding the ways in which structural racism works today. Scholars and historians studying the creation of race currently ground their analysis in this history. White privilege today is in part a result and construction of the historical creation of whiteness. This involves white people being able to identify themselves as fully human and reap the benefits of an economic and social system that has been created for their benefit (which we can describe as *white supremacy*). Even if whites are economically exploited we can still maintain some sort of social advantage over people of color. This competition between working people was constructed as a way for the earliest ruling classes of the US to be in control of workers and labor.

On racism

For myself, and many other white people, when I was growing up the terms racism, prejudice and discrimination were nearly synonymous. As a result, if I thought about the *idea* of racism, usually I would understand it as some sort of personal bias. Maybe I had some notion of how these biases were socially constructed but my analysis was not one based in the structural causes or effects of a racist system. I had an *idealist* understanding of what racism was. I thought about it as an idea: as long as one group of people thought they were better than another group, racism would be alive and well.

This idea of racism defined as personal bias and prejudice was engrained within me time and time again. Even within my family, my uncle was the racist one. My mom and dad would not make overtly racist or derogatory comments about people of color, so therefore they were not racist. Even if some prejudicial comment or observation came out, it was not as bad as my uncle, so therefore it was just simply labeled as not

politically correct, or offensive, and maybe something we shouldn't say. Again, I reiterate here the notion was never that this might be a deeply engrained way of living and seeing the world, but rather it was just something we needed to limit or stop saying.

Racism in this sense was not structural at all, but was based completely on personality and upbringing. It is easy, when racism is viewed like this, to point out the racists, and to place the weight of the existence of racism on them. I experienced this in a similar way while in Vermont, where the vast majority of people are white, yet there is very little discussion about race and racism, because there are not as many examples of overt and explicit racism. (However, while working with different groups in Brattleboro and participating in Diversity Day at Brattleboro Union High School, I saw several examples of overt racism, these examples are more frequent than people generally think).

Since coming to SIT and understanding the ways in which my white privilege operates in the world, I have come to see racism as a structural issue. While part of the social reality is certainly personal bias and prejudice, there is a big piece missing from that understanding. As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997) describes:

> This idealist view is still held widely among social scientists. Its narrow focus on ideas has reduced the study of racism mostly to social psychology, and this perspective has produced a schematic view of the way racism operates in society. First, racism is defined as a set of ideas or beliefs. Second, those beliefs are regarded as having the potential to lead individuals to develop prejudice, defined as "negative attitudes towards an entire group of people" (Schaefer 1990: 53). Finally, these prejudicial attitudes may induce individuals to real actions or discrimination against racial minorities. This conceptual framework, with minor modifications, prevails in the social sciences (p. 466).

While it is important for us to focus on stories and personal narratives to understand how racism manifests inside all of us, we must also understand the ways in which the systematic and structural foundations of racism help create an underpinning through

which these narratives emerge. Throughout my experience facilitating conversations about race and privilege, my story has been important to share. However, if I share my story in the absence of a structural understanding of the way that privilege works, then my analysis will fall short, and my white privilege will manifest once again, even in the way I understand racial identity and the history of race.

Racial Identity Development

While everyone has many different social identities, and these identities change and develop throughout our lives, my focus will be primarily on white racial identity because this is the experience that has informed my lived experience. Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson (1994) describe white racial identity development as, "…a series of stages through which individuals pass as their attitudes toward their own racial/ethnic group and the white population develop, ultimately achieving a 'healthy' identity" (129-130). Generally, the first stages of these models include an acceptance of views imposed by the dominant culture. Second stages are typically filled with conflict, where these notions are questioned. The next stage is marked by more of an outward rejection of these values proposed by the dominant society, and a movement toward claiming values outside of one's racial group. Finally, fourth stages usually involve redefining one's racial identity in a more positive view of themselves, while accepting positive qualities of cultures outside of their own (Rowe, Bennett, Atkinson 1994, p. 130). Although these are generalizations, this is typically the trajectory that white racial identity development models take on. Obviously these stages will manifest themselves differently depending

on other factors (different identity groups and a variety of different experiences namely) and each stage will look different depending on the individual.

As a white person, the trend is for us to realize our racial identity at later stages in our lives (and sometimes not at all) compared to people of color. As those who have been socialized into believing we are racially superior, it is easy for us to view the racial status quo as normalized in an effort to avoid thinking about ourselves as such. Because of this socialization, it has been my experience to ignore my racial identity for the majority of my life. As I have told different workshop participant groups, I recently realized I was white and it took me 26 years to do so. I knew that I wasn't Black, Latino, Asian, etc. and I knew that the color of my skin would generally place me in the racial category known as "white." But, throughout my childhood, I did not know what it meant to be white. Only with an understanding of white privilege and my own internalized racial superiority did I begin to understand and identify what it meant for me to be white.

Acceptance of our social identity (from the perspective of the dominant group) is very much shielded from our direct vision. Many examples throughout my youth were presented to me as normalized practices, in spite of the fact that they were completely or mostly racially segregated. These included everything from sports teams to school to church. I continued to ignore my race. Through this ignorance my racial identity was created: that I did not have a race, and to talk about race was to speak about people that looked different than me. This stage involves learning to develop an ideology and belief system about personal and other social identity groups (Hardiman and Jackson 1997, p. 3). My belief system was constructed on the basis that *white* was not actually a color and in order to define my own racial identity I needed other races to do so.

While I began to question paradigms created around other dominant identities of mine (including gender and sexuality), I did not concretely understanding my racial identity until I was a 26 year old graduate student at SIT. As Hardiman and Jackson make clear, anger is a prevalent emotion during what is known as the *resistance* stage. This was the first time in my life that my experiences and information about my white identity were being brought to my attention in a meaningful way. As Jackson and Hardiman (1997) write, "At resistance agents develop an awareness of their social identity, but one which is not necessarily positive" (p. 4). This was the case for me while I was studying in Vermont. I had trouble distinguishing between whiteness (the social construction) and white people (individuals affected by and immersed in whiteness). As a result I stereotyped white people (in a negative way) and consequently began to think less of myself in an attempt to distance myself from my own whiteness.

Although I believe these stages are fluid and individuals cannot exist entirely contained within one, it seems to me that right now I am attempting what has been labeled as the *redefinition* stage. In their social identity development model Hardiman and Jackson describe this stage:

> The experiences in resistance leave agents feeling negatively about their social group membership, confused about their role in dealing with oppression, and isolated from many other members of their social group. Developing a positive definition of their social identity and identifying aspects of their culture and group that are affirming are necessary parts of this stage. Men who form groups to examine their socialization and critically assess the definition of masculinity that they have internalized illustrate agents at this stage (1997, p. 5).

As I will describe in more detail in the next section, one of my primary roles at Guilford College has been to organize and facilitate a white caucus on campus. I have also been involved in two side projects working with men and masculinity and trying to understand

our socialization as masculine of center people.[4] While aspects from *acceptance* and *resistance* stages continue to form my worldview about my social identity, it is important for me to articulate how I am consciously trying to redefine my own sense of how I operate in the world given my socialization in a positive and self-affirming way.

Because I am working mostly with college students this notion is important. There is a certain maturity and experience level that all white people lack when it comes to conversations about race and racial identity. This lack of experience is not because we don't want to learn about ourselves, but rather because of the systems in place hide our privilege from us in order to maintain the power of whites in our society (Jackson and Hardiman 1997, p. 3). In my experience we are used to talking about it as something that is outside of ourselves. This will be an important factor in discussing the idea of experiential education in conjunction with social identities.

What are the objectives of cross-cultural training?

Training can encompass many different types of things and can be defined in a number of ways. While training is a wide concept and idea, I would like to keep the focus of this paper on cross-cultural training. Cross-cultural trainings are the only trainings I have been a part of, and the type of work I wish to pursue in the future. I view any type of anti-oppression training as a cross-cultural training. Culture is defined in the next section, and I most certainly agree that we all have our own personal cultures, which we create through our identities and worldviews. So, if we are doing an anti-racism

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[4] I use this term to avoid falling into the gender binary. For instance, a trans* man or a gender non-conforming person might not identify as a *man* or as a *male*, but this term allows individuals to identify on the gender spectrum as *masculine of center* but not necessarily falling into traditional definitions or conceptions of man or male.

training, then it is a cross-cultural training because as white people we are learning about cultures of people who identify differently racially. Even still as a white person, I am trying to understand the ways in which my whiteness influences my cultural identity.

The objectives of cross-cultural trainings are typically building skills, knowledge and awareness of how to change oneself to become a more effective tool for social change. My work in the MED has been facilitating conversations around social identity and trying to better understand myself and those around me. In her piece about Cross-cultural training, Margaret Pusch (1994) lays out some clear ideas about what different objectives might be in these trainings:

> The most specific type of objective is one that indicates a specific skill, behavior, or body of knowledge to be developed in the program. These may include *own-culture awareness* making conscious the trainee's cultural identity and finding out how others view his or her culture; *other-culture sensitivity,* recognizing how prejudices and stereotypes develop and affect relations between different people of different culture groups, or learning specific cultural data, traits, values, and customs of another culture; and *intercultural functioning,* learning about the cultural features of communication between individuals, and learning ways to build constructive and mutually satisfying relationships with people from other cultures and/or developing coping strategies for living in an unfamiliar cultural environment (Pusch 1994, 116).

All of these types of objectives are present whenever we are discussing social identity and social justice issues. We need to understand ourselves, the way the world sees us, and the ways in which we function together. These ideas are critical for the way we see training, and more generally the way we view social justice work.

How Can White People Create Spaces to Talk about Race?

"The Journey begins from inside your house."

-Proverb of Ghana

This proverb is on the front of the *Training for Social Action* coursepack (White 2011, p. 1) and touches exactly on the point of much of our work as white people trying to fight against racism and white supremacy. While it is important to understand how oppression operates and how structural inequalities affect people of color, it is imperative that I understand the ways in which whiteness functions within me as a white person and how my privilege affects every aspect of my life. In order to begin the journey toward racial justice, we must start within our own house as white people.

It is important to understand why the process of caucusing is necessary in the struggle against racism and white supremacy. As white people, we have been socialized to believe we are superior to those of other races. This socialization process and consequent internalization is referred to as *internalized racial superiority* (IRS). Crossroads Ministries defines IRS as:

> A complex multi-generational socialization process that teaches White people to believe, accept, and/or live out superior societal definitions of self and to fit into and live out superior societal roles. These behaviors define and normalize the race construct and its outcome: white supremacy (Dias, Drew and Gardiner, p. 5).

Because these behaviors are learned and normalized amongst white people, it is crucial for us self-identified anti-racist white folks to come together in community to understand the ways in which we have learned these behaviors. In order to unlearn and deconstruct how whiteness operates on systematic levels, it is imperative that we understand how it

operates within ourselves as individuals. Doing this in groups of anti-racist white people is a necessary step to building community.

This year during my work at Guilford College, I was the facilitator and organizer of the white caucus on campus. During the fall semester we met once a week and during the spring we met twice a week. Typically, our meeting on Wednesdays consisted of anywhere from 4-8 people and our Tuesday meetings were consistently 5 people attending our lunch working meetings.[5]

The White Caucus as a Culture Circle

Culture is a product of peoples' history. But it also reflects that history and embodies a whole set of values by which a people view themselves and their place in time and space. Cultural contact can therefore play a great part in bringing about mutual understanding between peoples of different nations.

-NGUGI WA THIONG'O
Moving the Centre

While I appreciate and understand this definition of culture, it is my sincere belief that we must expand this notion of culture to include race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, and any other facet of identity. While national identity is important, it is crucial, from my lens, to understand culture as a much more expanded idea. As a result we can talk about things like multiculturalism in a way that is not only about people from geographically different places, but from different experiences based on how they navigate the world around them and how the world paints them.

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[5] For the mission statement of the Guilford College white caucus, along with participant testimonies, please see Appendix A.

Whiteness is only part of the way that white people identify. While we each navigate the world at the intersection of many different socially created identities including race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, nationality, educational status, etc., we can be brought together when we share common experiences based on particular identities. It is not my idea that the white caucus at Guilford was one where everyone shared the same culture. However, this is a place where everyone in these conversations has had their values, ideas and behaviors in some way influenced by the internalization of whiteness and white supremacy.[6] As a result, coming together to understand how these internalized ideas affect our daily lives is necessary for anyone serious about anti-racism or any other social justice work.

Co-creating Information with Classmates Bevelyn Ukah and Dina Bataineh

The above quotation about culture comes from Bevelyn's listening project for her capstone work. It was my inspiration for connecting my work with the white caucus and the ideas of culture circles, which we initially learned about in *Training for Social Action.* I thank her for it. The specific idea for naming the white caucus as a culture circle came from Bevelyn's ideas and our conversation while driving together and talking about our capstones on May 16th, 2013. Bevelyn is working on a Course-Linked Capstone as well and her work is related to organizing and facilitation as a part of social change. We were

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[6] White supremacy (as defined by the White Privilege Conference's Youth Action Project): A historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of nations and peoples of color by white identified peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege (Youth Action Project 2013 Curriculum Overview, p. 4).
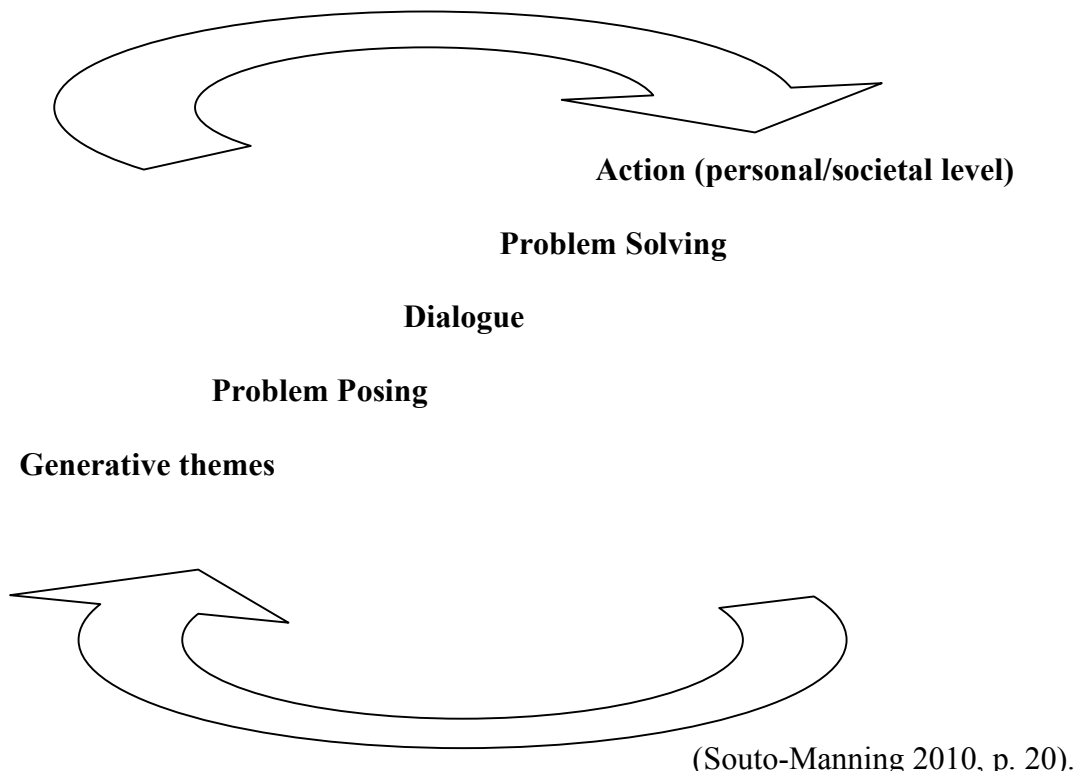
talking about Listening Projects as a way to understand social change, which is another aspect of her work.

I am also using my experience in a training facilitated by Dina (Exploring Race Through Culture Circles, May 4th, 2012, as part of the *Training for Social Action* Class) that was a conversation about race and racial identity in the form of a culture circle. This is not my knowledge and these are not my ideas solely. While I am applying them to the work I am doing, they did not start with me and they will not end with me. Even though this knowledge, information and inspiration did not come from a book, or an otherwise "academic" source, it is still valid and I must give credit to my mentors and teachers. As a result this is my way of citing their work and their influence on me. Thank you Dina and thank you Bevelyn. (B. Ukah, Personal Communications, May 16, 2013). (D. Bataineh, Personal Communications, May 4, 2012).

The idea of culture circles has been around for many centuries. The first person to name them as such was Paolo Freire in Brazil during the mid-20th century. Initially, these circles were intended for teaching literacy,-which was against the traditional, oppressive method of 'banking' information. Freire describes this concept in his now famous book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* "It follows logically from the banking notion of consciousness that the educator's role is to regulate the way the world 'enters into' the students. The teacher's task is to organize a process which already occurs spontaneously to 'fill' the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge" (Freire 2000, p. 76). Culture circles are one form of critical pedagogy (explained in further detail in the next section), which is the type of education based on liberation that Freire envisioned and helped implement in his native Brazil.

Culture circles, in opposition to the traditional banking method, utilize the knowledge and experiences of those students who are in the circle in order to pose and subsequently seek solutions for problems that are applicable to the real world of those doing the learning. In her book *Freire, Teaching and Learning*, Marianne Souto-Manning (2010) goes into depth about the history and theory behind Freire and his culture circles. This is a concept I first learned in *Training for Social Action.* My understanding of culture circles was expanded through the training of my colleague Dina Bataineh as part of this course. The ideas about applying learning from our own experience is a direct connection to experiential learning, which was discussed in depth in the *Training Design for Experiential Learning* course.

Souto-Manning explains the nature of a culture circle as critical cycles and describes it containing the following:

Action (personal/societal level)

Problem Solving

Dialogue

Problem Posing

Generative themes

(Souto-Manning 2010, p. 20).

While all of these steps appear to be chronological, in reality culture circles will be moving all over the place. Participants might start solving the problem before it has even been named. Or they might try moving to action, before dialogue has occurred and all participants share a similar understanding of what that action might be. The point is that this is a theory and a model, and in the real world the outcomes might not be as simple and concrete as we would hope. This also speaks to the importance of the facilitator in spaces like this. The process needs to be very intentional and therefore facilitation is required every step of the way.

The themes generated in these circles come from the lived experiences of the participants. The next step of the process is posing problems. After a theme might come up (for white caucus we can use the example of white silence, a topic to be explored later in this paper), the next question might be, "why do you think this is happening?" (Souto-Manning, p. 37). Next comes dialogue. One of the most important and arduous steps, dialogue is where the movement begins to happen. As Souto-Manning (2010) describes it, "In culture circles, dialogue allows teachers/facilitators to collectively construct knowledge about teaching that is theoretically sound and directly relevant to the realities of each and every participant" (p. 39). The final two steps are problem solving and action. During the actions, whether they are personal are societal in nature, there should always be new themes that are generated, that require new conversations.

The white caucus certainly possessed pieces of the model described above. There were themes generated during these conversations and we always had dialogue during our meetings, however, we must also acknowledge the limitations of this space. Namely, we only met for one hour a week and sometimes there were different participants in the

circles. In these ways, it was difficult for the culture circle to maintain its shape and form throughout the weeks, but there were parts of it that apply directly to this way of learning.

In order to illustrate this model functioning in these spaces, let us walk through some of our process in the white caucus. Every meeting we would open with the question, "what is sitting with you right now?" It was an opportunity for participants to share something that had happened to them, or to get something onto the table that they had been thinking about deeply. This was our opportunity to generate themes together. At times I would also bring themes into the discussion (from my experience personally or working in the MED). At this point in the conversation we would engage in dialogue. We would try to ensure that most of the voices at the table were heard and ideas and experiences were shared and analyzed as a group.

As a way to start bridging the gap between dialogue and problem solving/action, we also started doing homework. This was a way for participants to apply their learning and direct the conversation toward action. Although we started this practice late, it seems that it was effective in turning the dialogue into action, at least on a personal level. For the purpose of this culture circle (which is essentially to eliminate white supremacy and racism) it is a very lofty, and potentially impossible task. However, beginning to dismantle the internalized racial superiority built up inside of us is an important step. One clear example of this was when we left a meeting and had the homework of trying to understand more deeply what our gaps were as anti-racism activists. The dialogue preceding it involved me sharing an example of a gap I am working on, and participants sharing what they might want to work on. As a result, we were able to begin applying our words and dialogues into action through the use of this culture circle.

Co-creating Learning Environments

Because whiteness is a collectively created consciousness and a social identity, the only way to understand and begin working against white supremacy is to create learning environments together. As Margaret Andersen writes in her article *Whitewashing Race: A Critical Perspective on Whiteness* (2003), "Whereas in many disciplines race has typically been treated as an attribute, whiteness studies reestablish the significance of race as a social construction. As a consequence, the methodology of much of this writing is narrative, autobiographical, and textual" (p. 27). This idea illustrates not only the importance of stories and personal narratives (which we use often in this space), but also of how any learning around this subject needs to be co-created by those having the conversation, because this is essentially how our white identity is created as well, through social construction.

We discussed and analyzed the co-creation of learning spaces at SIT. Throughout my time in Greensboro, I have come to understand that this work literally cannot work unless the learning spaces are co-created. As a facilitator and a white person who is working on dismantling my own internalized racial superiority, I must recognize that I am simultaneously a participant as well. This is a profound insight that I have gained from these discussions. I may be a facilitator in the sense that I am bringing discussion points and challenging participants throughout the session, but my language and analysis always needs to be open for feedback. What makes a good facilitator in these spaces is that as a white man I recognize how much work I need to do, while at the same time recognizing that I bring unique and important facilitation skills. This sense of modesty

does not diminish my work as a facilitator, but rather deepens the trust and relationships between facilitator and participants and allows for movement on both sides.

During the first meeting of the white caucus (both for the fall and spring semesters) we spent the first part of our meeting defining what the space would look like and why each of us were here. This idea speaks to the idea that Paulo Freire touches on often and Marianne Souto-Manning discusses in her book. Souto-Manning (2010) writes about four central aspects to the idea of critical pedagogy. The last aspect is one where the teacher is always at the same time a learner. This idea can be applied to training and facilitation as well:

> By starting with not only what students know, but with the issues that are truly important in their out-of-school lives, teachers have a better chance to engage all students in naming the issues and engaging in problem-posing education. In this process, authority is dialectically negotiated as teachers assume the role of facilitators and focus on problem posing as they seek to engage in critical education (p. 14).

When discussing race and racial identity it is imperative that stories and experiences come into the space. Without these personalized experiences it is impossible to understand theories based on systems of oppression and privilege. It also would not allow participants the space to understand their own socialization. While including stories and personal experience as the focal point of the discussion we can start to name and understand the ways in which systematic white privilege manifest in our individual experiences.

Also, through this process, participants in the white caucuses have come to understand a sense of ownership and accountability to the work. Every Tuesday, the participants in our lunch working group confirm with me that they will attend, and unless

class priorities interfere, they are there every week. In spite of busy schedules and other discussions about race with their friends and in their classes, these students, staff members and faculty continue to approach me with questions and continue to build the conversation week after week. The reality is, without the participants and their personal experiences, there would be no white caucus. This learning environment is truly co-created.

One insight from this particular experience was the importance of personalizing and applying the discussion for all participants. Because of busy schedules and a variety of priorities (most of the Tuesday group were second semester seniors, trying to finish college and start their life post-graduation) it was easy for participants to avoid this space. However, based on the personal narrative and application to theories and concepts we were discussing, participation was consistent and participants were dedicated to the space and the goals of the caucus. Without this dedication the depth of learning and the effectiveness of the dialogue is impossible. This is an invaluable piece of learning for any facilitator, especially when dealing with white privilege and its manifestations in doing anti-racism work. Even though we all identified as white anti-racists, it is easy to slip back into an ignorance of racial identity and continue the historical process of invisibilizing whiteness. Facilitators in spaces like these need to have a firm sense of personal application and connection as well as concrete ideas of dedication, or else the goals will be much more difficult to reach.

Connection between Theory and Practice – Experiential Learning

While the idea of white privilege and the discussion of white supremacy are necessarily theoretical in nature, through our experiential discussions we are attempting to merge theory and practice and understand our individual experiences through ideas about social identity.

An example of this is the space created in one of our first caucuses of the semester. There were similar themes being touched on by multiple participants. When asked, "when did you first start to understand white privilege?" many of the participants shared stories about living abroad, or working with organizations like School of the Americas Watch that were organizing to stop militarism in a different part of the world. This idea has been labeled in *The Atlantic Monthly* by Teju Cole (2012) as the "White Savior Industrial Complex." Cole describes part of the problem, "If Americans want to care about Africa, maybe they should consider evaluating American foreign policy, which they already play a direct role in through elections, before they impose themselves on Africa itself" (Cole 2012). This is a similar sentiment that we discuss time and time again in the white caucus. In order for us to understand the inherent unfairness in the social, political and economic systems all around us, we must understand the role we play in creating and maintaining these systems. As white people, one way we can do this is by understanding the ways our privilege gives us material benefits.

In our group, one participant referred to a similar phenomenon as "self-created ignorance." The idea was that some white people (usually in the US and typically identifying as liberal or progressive) tend to organize to help communities of color (usually in places outside of the US) or join service organizations like the Peace Corps or

Save the Children. However, these same white people do not recognize the ways in which white privilege and its connection to racial oppression is functioning in their everyday lives. This can be attributed, in some sense, to a disconnect between theory and practice. In spite of their understanding of privilege and racial identity, the focus of these students remained on communities and individuals in far off places and not on themselves or their own communities. Because of this, most of the conversation in our white caucus centered around the communities that these students are a part of and their own identities.

As a result we found ourselves having conversations each week about what our communities and our friend groups look like and some ways in which we might be able to begin organizing around issues of white privilege in our lives in Greensboro, North Carolina, USA. One participant started attending meetings for the Latino/a group on campus, Hispanos Unidos de Guilford (HUG). One student put together a workshop for the LGBTQQA Symposium, which addressed the intersections of race, sexuality, gender and other identities. Another participant came to the Bayard Rustin Center (part of the Multicultural Education Department) for the first time in her four years at Guilford. Although these might be small steps, they are certainly examples of the power of combining theory and practice and trying to tie them together through discussion and sharing of personal experiences.[7]

As a facilitator I learned that unless we begin to ask a question around application (for example, "what do we do with this knowledge), we would remain stagnant. Especially as white people doing anti-racism work, it is easy to fall into the trap of

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[7] For a personal reflection on the White Savior Industrial Complex, see Appendix B.

talking without action. As a facilitator in this space it was crucial for me to continue

asking questions relating to action and application. We touched on problems and

methods for solving those problems time and time again, but we found ourselves, often

times, having similar conversations. One way of breaking this cycle is to ask these

application questions, repetitively. It might sound redundant, but in my experience

unless we are given legitimate answers based on actions being undertaken, we will end

our experiential learning cycle at dialogue and get stuck there.

Conceptual Framework: Connections to Training Courses
Insights and Learning

While studying at SIT, I was first exposed to the concept of experiential learning

in a formal way. Of course I had understood that this was not the way I learned best (take

any example from 'school', and what ideas and concepts had stuck in my mind). But I

also understood that my experiences outside of the classrooms since I was a child had not

only fed my imagination and my understanding of the world as it is, but they had also

allowed me to learn deeply and maintain ideas and concepts based on experience,

reflection, generalizing, and application.

Throughout the course of the year I have been writing reflective pieces as a way

to understand the insights I was gaining into my own identity (both my social identity and

my identity as a trainer). Some of the more relevant reflections will appear as appendices

and I will be using all of my learning from them to discuss insights I have gained as a

trainer throughout the year.

Internalizing the Experiential Learning Process

My work at SIT revolved around preparing, implementing and evaluating training based on what we were learning in our courses. Although we were being prepared to think on our toes, and trying to always keep Ryland White's words in my head "Plan like hell and go with the flow," you can never really understand what this means until you are put in a place where you must do a workshop with virtually no preparation time. What is really required to be successful in situations like these is to have some sense of how well you understand (even on an unconscious level) the experiential learning cycle and what the idea of experiential learning really means.

The Soy Un Lider Conference has been taking place for the past 6 years at Guilford College. First created by a Latino Guilford student, the main purpose of the conference is to introduce Latino/a and immigrant youth to the college application process and to begin preparing them for their post-high school journey.

While I was a staff member of the office, Jorge had asked me to facilitate a workshop at the conference about a week before it began. Because there were so many other logistical issues to take care of before the conference started (involving free transportation for over 150 high school students from three different counties and over 15 high schools), I had little time to prepare for my workshop. Finally, on the night before the conference at 10:30pm, when I was leaving to get some rest, I checked in with Jorge and he let me know which workshop I would be facilitating.[8]

I realized after these workshops that I was learning as I went through the day. I literally understood what it meant to apply these concepts to the experiences of the

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[8] To read about my experience during these workshops please see Appendix C.

students as I went along. As a result I tried different activities throughout the day. One involved breaking into small groups and talking about a destination they wanted to go to. This built listening skills, as well as engaged students in a vision of where they might want to go (using college as a possible means to get there). Also, there was a wealth of experience in the room already, as each group had three leaders from Guilford College who had come from similar circumstances as the participants and were currently in college.

Although these brief workshops were only 50 minutes long, we had a chance to engage in some publishing, generalizing and applying. In the end I would always ask a question about how the students might use the ideas we spoke about to apply them to their personal circumstances. Some students were shyer than others, but many people had ideas about how they might prepare themselves better to apply to colleges. As is described in the article *Processing Experiential Learning* by J.W. Pfeiffer, the last step for the facilitator is the summary, which involves generalizing and applying. Pfeiffer (1994) writes, "…the facilitator has several content tasks and some critical process responsibilities. These include linking observations of the activity to theory and helping the participants to make connections and generalizations" (p. 214). This process must become almost second nature to the trainer. As someone who is recently new to this type of workshop facilitation, my process is still in its beginning stages. However, what this experience taught me at the Soy Un Lider Conference, was that I must internalize these steps and understand them as part of the *idea* of experiential learning and not just another step in the process.

Co-Creating Learning Environments:

White Silence Workshop

In theory, the idea of co-creating learning environments sounds like an appropriate strategy to allow for a diversity of experiences and opinions. Through many different experiences as a facilitator this year, I have learned that the idea of co-creating learning environments is not about understanding this as a concept, but rather a way of viewing the world and how we learn. As Beard and Wilson (2002) write in their article, *Exploring Experiential Learning*, "In summary, we are saying that the foundation of much learning is the interaction between self and the external environment, in other words the experience" (p. 41). This became especially clear for me during different experiences as a facilitator.

In March, I facilitated a two-hour workshop on the idea of white silence. This idea has been around for a while, but was finally put into theory by Robin DiAngelo (2012). Part of her analysis is captured here:

> In racial dialogue, white silence functions overall to shelter white participants by keeping their racial perspectives hidden and thus protected from exploration or challenge. Not contributing one's perspectives serves to ensure that those perspectives cannot be expanded. While one can, of course, gain deeper understanding through listening, there are several problems with this being one's primary mode of engagement. Listening alone leaves everyone else to carry the weight of the discussion. And, of course, if everyone chose this mode no discussion (and hence no learning) would occur at all. On the other hand, one may have something to say that is insightful and contributes to everyone's learning, but if a lack of confidence can't be overcome, everyone loses (DiAngelo 2012, p. 4).

Although this is the main push for DiAngelo's theory, there is much more to unpack about this idea. Racial power dynamics are always unbalanced, as a result of systematic racism. Therefore, unless these dynamics are addressed in every space where race is being discussed, then we will not have the opportunity to deconstruct these power imbalances. We had 11

participants in the room and two facilitators. Although we were technically co-facilitators, I was doing most of the facilitation and Jorge came in with an explanation and comment when necessary.

During this workshop we started with an activity. We posted common justifications for white silence on pieces of paper all around the room. We then encouraged participants to stand by the quotation that resonated with them most. If the participant identified as a white person, then it would be one that came into their head often during discussions about race. For people of color, the idea was to stand by one that they had heard before, or that they were particularly interested in. What this served to do was bring a variety of experiences and ideas into the room. From that point forward everyone had introduced something into the room. We would go from those experiences.

As I have learned throughout this year, even-I as a facilitator need to share stories and experiences in order for people to understand the ideas and theories before them. I told a story of a white man in an anti-racism workshop, who told an emotional and heartfelt story of his family. He told a story about a piece of land his family had since before the US was technically a country. As a result he had thought of something that he never thought of before. This man was clearly emotionally affected by what he had shared. After his story, there was no affirmation from other white people. My question to the group in the workshop was, "how might this impact the ways this man tells stories similar in the future?"

We then engaged in a discussion around what people (I was also in that workshop and decided to say nothing) might have said to affirm and validate that person's experience. We came to a consensus in the room that it might be difficult for this man to share stories like this in the future, if he expects to be met with silence after sharing. This also connects back to the idea of white silence, which obviously I was taking part in, along with all of the other white people in that workshop. This is an excellent example of the ways in which white

silence serves to uphold and maintain white privilege in spaces like this. Even with the intention of bringing out and dismantling white privilege in an anti-racism workshop, white silence serves to do just the opposite.

I understand this type of example as co-creating a learning space. Not because I am in school to study what a co-created learning space means, but rather because we were painting a picture and trying to understand what an idea meant in reality. As John Dewey writes, "Thinking, in other words, is the intentional endeavor to discover specific connections between something which we do and the consequences which result, so that they two become continuous" (Dewey 1916, p. 144-145). Ideas and theories are meaningless if they remain isolated outside of our experiences. This is the strength and the magic of experiential learning.

As a facilitator in spaces like this, we are always given choices. I could have read from the article, or continued to use academic language. Even though we are at an academic institution, these words would still not have affected the group in the way of painting a picture to come to a more co-created understanding of the idea. I provided the example, but the bigger point is that people are supposed to generate their own ideas and examples of similar situations, and that is exactly what we stressed during the workshop.

White Caucus

One particular week during the white caucus we were discussing our gaps as anti-racism activists. During this particular time, there were a few different themes that came alive. Firstly, after I asked the question, three different participants took their time to derail from the conversation. These participants were answering different questions and were giving experiences related to white privilege but not related to the question at hand.

As I was attempting to re-direct the conversation to this question the group became frustrated and was not able to understand what I meant by "gaps." In my mind this question was very clear, but in the room there was very little understanding, and it was clear that the participants were uncomfortable opening up about such an issue. In their book *Listening for a Change: Oral Testimony and Community Development,* Hugo Slim and Paul Thomson (1995) write extensively about oral histories and the importance of testimonies. They write, "The great strength of oral testimony is its ability to capture personal experience and individual perception. Oral testimony thus produces 'opinionated' material in the best sense of the word" (p. 143). This idea of oral history popped into my mind as someone said, "can you give us an example of what you mean?" I traced some recent reflections in my own head and came up with an idea to tell a story.

I told a story of myself in a group of different people identifying in some way as Black. This group was having a deep conversation about racial identity and the different ways in which they experienced their Blackness. Throughout the conversation, I couldn't quite find the right words to say. I kept throwing the idea of how I might start my comment or what I might say. I kept trying to understand if I had a place to say anything in those moments. In the end, I didn't say anything, and it wasn't until afterwards that I realized the mistake I had made. I was the only person in the entire group that did not say anything, and it was brought to my attention afterwards, that there is really no way for people to trust me in moments like that if they do not know what is going on with my process.

I used this as an example in a way to show that one of my gaps was indeed the way I show myself as an anti-racist white person. I thought I was much further along than I was, and as a result my anti-racism looked a lot different to others than it did to myself. This example was meant to show people a number of things. One, that I had gaps and was working on expressing what they were as well as trying to make those gaps smaller. Two,

that it was okay to not completely understand what the gaps were and why we had them, but it is important to try talking about them. And lastly, we all have gaps and even if we choose to ignore them, they will still be there. This also pointed to the idea of white silence described above and how, even in a situation where I felt like I was giving up my power, I was actually maintaining unequal racial dynamics in the group.

These moments taught me that I needed to see myself in my participants (as a trainer) and that I needed to see myself in other white people (as a white person). This is a broader topic that I will address later in the paper, but it is extremely relevant here. As a white trainer working with white participants it is doubly important that I see myself in the people who are in the conversation. If I view myself as outside of this experience, then I start to rely again on the banking theory described by Freire. By trying to understand that the socialization and internalization of white supremacy has happened inside all of us (albeit in different ways depending on our other identities), I am able to be a more effective listener and interpreter. I am also becoming more comfortable at sharing my stories as a way to open the door to sharing experiences and trying to reflect and understand ourselves better.

Training Styles (as part of Facilitation Competencies)

Like many theories and concepts that get planted onto real life experiences, it is impossible to separate out all of these different training styles. I am simultaneously listening in order to be a better coach, interpreting so that I can be a better director and all four of these types blend into one another to form a complex mode of training that is always being altered and updated. Having said this, I have learned much about myself as coach, listener, interpreter and director, through my work at Guilford College.

Coach

"Coaches encourage experimentation through practical application: 'trying on new ideas,' practicing new behaviors, having a go at new skills." (Pickren and Blitzer 1992, p. 34). This is very applicable to questions around race and identity. For a white person trying to unlearn and undo the racism that has been built inside of me, I need people in support and solidarity with me, allowing me to see the ways that behavior can be molded to break through some of the white supremacy we are bred to live within and under.

I live into this role by giving ideas or trying to get down into the behavior of people. What do your friend groups look like? How do you choose these groups? Do you question the racial make-up of these groups? Questions like these help to get down into issues behind what might cause people to behave in certain ways. My goal as a facilitator in these situations is to try to co-create a space where both of us might learn how our white identity has influenced these behaviors and ideas. The idea is to combine interpretation and coaching. I do not view my role as someone who needs to tell people how they should be living into their white anti-racism but I do think that part of my role is holding people accountable to themselves. One way to do this is through understanding that new modes of behavior and interacting are necessary in order to break the mold of racist structures surrounding us. Coaching is an important step in doing this.

I think I also can apply this to my work with students of color at Guilford as well. This, again, does not mean that I am telling people what they should or need to do, but rather asking questions about how they are taking care of themselves, what their schedule is looking like, how much time they have for themselves. It is important for me to

understand that I am asking myself these very same questions and that I am not suggesting by asking them, that I have any answers. I think the best coaches are people who can challenge and push you, but also allow you the space to understand that the changes and the actions you must undertake, must be undertaken by you and your agency, and the coach cannot do it for you.

Listener

"Gives the floor to the participants…and concentrates on encouraging learners to express their emotions, needs and experiences" (Pickren and Blitzer 1992, p. 34). This type of facilitation style is crucial in anti-racism work. Especially with white people, there is a tendency to hide much of our stories in the shame and guilt that white privilege often wraps us in. To break through this privilege we must share our stories, give our experiences, and begin to understand and own our privilege. I also have the privilege of being a white person in these spaces. If I were a person of color doing this work, the chances that white people would share openly with me would drop substantially (this coming from my experience of nervousness and anxiety around sharing just how racist I am around my friends of color, as well as my experience in anti-racism workshops of white people not speaking up or rather trying to justify their behaviors rather than take responsibility for the privilege they live with everyday). Because of this privilege, it is important that I take the time and energy to allow white people to share their stories, experiences, worries and joys with me.

Facilitating the white caucus has given me a chance to do this, as well as the individual meetings I have been having with students. We always start our sessions with stories and things that have happened to us in the recent past. I usually open the floor for

connections to these stories, or try to fill in one of mine that might be relevant. These conversations are so important and I think it is important for the Listener to lay out ground rules in the beginning of these conversations, so people have a framework to work within while sharing, but it is important that the space is facilitated and participant views and experiences are protected in some sense.

I also understand the Listener Style in a different sense than when I first learned it. In my view when I was at SIT, listening was always a good thing, however it is important to note that when to use this particular *training style* is different than simply listening. As a facilitator, we make conscious choices about when to use the Listener Style and other training styles. Therefore, I would use the Listener Style more often as a facilitator. It was important for me to validate those sharing experiences, especially in spaces where identity is being discussed. Also, as a learner in these spaces I recognize that I have so much to learn so choosing the Listener Style also benefits me in that way as well.

Especially while learning about my privilege, I needed to take up less space and I needed to be listening to the experience of others. As a trainer if I didn't use this framework, not only would I be putting the burden on oppressed people to educate the privileged about their experiences, but also I would be operating under the assumption that a privileged experience is invalid or illegitimate and therefore be a part of furthering the normalization of privileged identities. This would also continue the dehumanizing of those who are the oppressors.

As a facilitator, especially in the white caucus, I came to understand just how important it was for me to avoid the frame of invalidating experiences because they come

from privileged perspectives. One thing I learned from facilitating these spaces is that we *need* to share our experiences, no matter what they are, in order to learn. So much of the struggle in discussing and dismantling white privilege is understanding where our ideas and behaviors come from. If we begin to see the stories and experiences of others, we might be more inclined to think about our own contexts. As a facilitator, I played an important role in trying to ensure that these stories come out from everyone. As much as I needed to share to allow others to see my process, I learned just how important it is for white people talking about their experiences to have others who are open and willing to hear their stories. If we do not have people who will invest in us, then we will be much less likely to share our stories and much less likely to see our experiences as valid and important.

As mentioned above, I think it is really important for me to understand the ways in which I have listened to experiences of oppression on a personal basis. This does not come out through asking women how they are oppressed, or Black people how they experience racism, but rather by *being* with people. Being with people in relationships and being with people through their stories and through their emotions. If a facilitator cannot do this, then they will lose something so important for their facilitation. If the facilitator is a white person and engaged in conversations around racial diversity then it is not only important for that person to share their story, but equally important to listen deeply. Not only listen deeply but actually placing ourselves with that person and not questioning what their experience or emotions are. Listening for me, is allowing all of that person's truth to show through in those moments. Without this, we lose a piece of our compassion, empathy and humanity.

This type of listening is not something that comes easily for most people who grew up in US American culture. We listen for what we need and then we discard the rest. We wait until we can respond and then we do, getting across what we want to express. As facilitators, especially working toward social justice, listening is one of the most important tools. As a result we must hone this skill and this type of training style. For myself as a white man, I must acknowledge the internalized supremacy that I hold inside of me and the barrier that this internalization creates for real listening. Because of this, I must develop deep friendships and I must thank and appreciate my friends over and over again for their patience and persistence with me.

Interpreter

"…the interpreter strives to create other interpreters by focusing on the facts, the terminology, the logical implications—in short, on the task at hand, not on the feelings associated with it" (Pickren and Blitzer 1992, p. 34). Interpreting is an important part of anti-racism work. While my work with white people included many conversations about feelings and emotions, it also involved understand the realities of what was really happening.

This training style brings me to one particular example from a white caucus. One participant was describing a difficult time she was having with her family and discussing these issues. The participants claimed that she "wanted to be the person listened to." There was a big assumption in her sentence that she was right and her friends and family were wrong. Rather than take this time to investigate feelings, I made the choice to try and see if we could understand the multiple truths happening that this participant was addressing. I asked some questions about what she meant by that and why she thought

that her opinion was more valid than theirs. After some time other participants jumped in with their own experiences and stories and we built a dialogue. We weren't looking for answers or concrete solutions but rather, we were trying to understand where this participant was coming from, validate their experience and build solidarity around similar conflicts that people might face.

In moments like these, it is very important for the facilitator to listen, but there also needs some interpretation and re-direction of the conversation. This must happen, especially working with white people in anti-racism work. We are often times (based on my own experience) self-righteous and believe that we have all of the answers, and that we have the "right" perspective. While it may be true that those of use who acknowledge our privilege are recognizing a reality for many people who are not white, this does not mean that our perspective is even in the majority for white people. As a result, we need to envision a strategy to deal with people who deny the existence of the very thing we are discussing with them. In order to do this, we must work on our interpretation skills and we must understand the importance of the intersection of facts and feelings.

Director

"Typical directors prepare outlines, follow step-by-step lesson plans and appear self-confident as they clarify what they want people to do" (Pickren and Blitzer 1992, p. 34). While I have had a difficult time seeing myself as a Director (mostly based on my privileged identities) I have come to understand the power of directing the conversation and staying closely to an agenda. Derailing and re-directing the conversation is a common theme when discussing race and white privilege with white people. Even while at SIT, when conversations about race came up with white people, there was a constant

push to include things like gender, class, sexuality and others. Of course we must honor and respect the intersectionality of social identities, however, one manifestation of white supremacy is changing the subject so that race is not at the center of the conversation.

While, I was often times open to different topics of conversation in the white caucus, there were many examples where people were talking about the white privilege of *other* people, or different examples of privilege (male, heterosexual, etc.). These times it was difficult for me to allow space for flexibility in the conversation and to continue pushing participants to think about their own privilege and how it operates. The example I cited before about questioning the caucus about the gaps in their anti-racism activism, is a good example where my Director role served me very well. I got feedback from all of the people in that conversation that they appreciated being pushed into a bit of discomfort and into addressing their own privilege.

Directing does not need to be oppressive and rigid. Directing can be "gentle and disarming" as one participant described my facilitation in that session. I am coming to understand that in particular conversations with white people about white privilege require some direction, or else we will slip into topics unrelated and continue to uphold and protect our privilege.

Seeing Myself in Others

What I have come to realize throughout this year of working at Guilford is that my experience as a white man working in multiculturalism does not diminish or lessen my opinion. It does not mean that my words or experiences are less valid. It does not mean that I shouldn't share my story openly in a way to express to others what is going

on with me. What it does mean is that I am far from perfect, but need to be open about and take accountability for my own imperfections. This is no different from anyone else, however coming from my experience of privilege, sometimes we can try to distance ourselves from the material benefits and the system that gives us these benefits. I can talk as though it is *those* white people who are not like me. It is *those* white people who have yet to make the leap into trying to understand their own privilege.

This not only destroys community in any effort to achieve social justice, but it also destroys solidarity amongst white people. If the world is full of anti-racist whites and racist whites (since this dichotomy is certainly being created inside of my brain when I am making these distinctions) and these are the only two groups, then how do the racist whites ever make any progress on their internalized racial superiority? And, on the other side, how do the anti-racist whites understand that simply because they have acknowledged their privilege that doesn't mean that they have rid themselves of all the socialization that white supremacy has filled them with for their whole life?

While it might seem obvious to some reading this or even when I am talking about it that white people need to act in community and be in solidarity with one another, I can assure you that, similarly to white guilt, this isolation and separation between the "good whites" and the "bad whites" is as constructed and socially conditioned as any other aspect of our racial identity. Once I had some realizations about myself, my experiences and the wide advantages I have reaped as a white person in a society built to benefit me, I immediately started to individualize and look for sources to blame. In a 2010 TedTalk, Brene Brown touches on shame, fear, vulnerability and worthiness. She describes blame as "a way to discharge discomfort and pain" (Brown, Brené

2010, March). This is exactly what I was doing when I was trying to assign blame for my unawareness of my white privilege. I was experiencing severe pain and did not know how to get it out. Blame was the answer for me.

My guess would be for any white person who has a realization that they have privilege (that is to say that they have some *unearned* material benefits simply because of the color of their skin) that this realization process necessarily will be filled with discomfort and pain. Surely, everyone has a different experience and there might be some who come to know this reality through more comfortable means, but my experience in working with white people trying to fight against racism, is that it is a painful and uncomfortable process. This is to be expected, after all the system of white supremacy is what keeps us unable to understand our own privilege, all of the while giving us advantages.

So, my thinking in why I was rejecting people like me is that I was blaming myself. I was blaming my family. I was blaming my teachers, my coaches, my mentors, my friends, and pretty much anyone else who did not tell me just how deep my own privilege was because of my skin color. In turn, I started blaming white people. As a way for me to discharge my own pain and discomfort, I started to pin racism on individuals. (Again, this is what white supremacy wants us to do.) I wasn't doing this by saying that racism was only prejudice or bias, but rather I was ascribing a systematic and socially created identity to a biological or personal development model. I would get upset with white people for what they would say, or an ideology they would cling to, or a job they were taking. All of this because I thought that my version of being white was different. I had barely any white friends, I was open to feedback about my privilege, I

was truly working for social justice and unless you shared my outlook, then I couldn't work with you.

Again, what this serves to do is divide white people who are trying to fight for social justice. Even if people are not fighting for social justice, they will surely feel isolated if I am not willing to engage with them. In some sense, what I was doing was taking white supremacy to the opposite extreme and stereotyping white people as harmful, racist, and ignorant, and placing people of color in the other end, hard-working, strong and committed to social justice.[9] Of course these are silly stereotypes to play into (just as silly as any other stereotype that we actually base decisions and behavior on).

While this realization continues to be incredibly important for me as a social justice organizer and self-identified white anti-racist, it is also crucial for me to understand as a trainer. Although I have difficulty differentiating between myself as a white person and as a trainer (I operate in both realities all of the time), I do understand that if I do not see myself in my participants, then I will never be able to reach a level of co-created learning that is authentic and based on experiential learning.

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[9] In addition to the fact that this is actually a racist construct I was ascribing to. To view all white people as bad and people of color as good is to again dehumanize people of color in a different way. If Black people don't have anything to work out around their own identity, or don't make mistakes when organizing around social justice issues, then that would mean that they are perfect, and that I shouldn't call them on their own internalized issues. This is both destructive and moving away from the type of liberated community that we are trying to build. No community will be liberated if we assume the oppressed are always right and the oppressors are always wrong. Identity is much more complex than this, and this also does not take into consideration the intersectionality of different identities.

Insights from this Process

Although I have realized through all of this, that I certainly need to be able to understand the ways in which me moving away from white people and stereotyping white people was a negative thing. There is no denying that this was me trying to move away from my own privilege by surrounding myself with people who did not look like me (in fact while at SIT I had no white male friends who I considered close). However, in spite of this, I was also moving toward something by building these relationships and this community and that movement is undeniably important in my process and my growth as a human being and as a social justice activist.

I cannot honestly try to quantify just how my relationships with the women and people of color in my life during my time in Vermont have impacted me and the insights I have received. But what I can say is that when you develop relationships with people, it gives you personal insights into what their life is like. Stemming from these personal insights, we are able to more deeply understand the theories and concepts about issues like oppression and marginalization in a more nuanced way. Insights into what living a day in their shoes might actually look/feel/smell like. But this is not the same as listening to someone tell a story and trying to place yourself there.

I was in the grocery store when a white man approached my friend to tell her that she looked like the woman on the olive oil jar. Although they had little to no resemblance outside of their similar skin color this man was persistent and did not give up. Standing with my friend I only mustered, "no, that looks nothing like her at all." I could have done something else, but I was busy trying to understand how this was affecting her and how it might affect me, if I were in a similar position.

This served to humble me and allowed me to receive feedback in a way that is productive and valuable for me. I get defensive, I try to justify my actions, but I hear what my friends are saying and if they ask me to listen, I will most certainly listen. By listening to the stories and experiences of my friends facing racism and male supremacy (sometimes from me) I was also able to gain new perspectives on who I was and why I did some of the things that I did. For as much as I wanted to deny it, when my friends would tell me about mistreatment, or more generally examples of institutional or individual racism, these examples were inside of me as well.

When I first saw my friend's afro, I asked her if I could touch it. Reaching out my hand, I did not get to her hair. I had no idea of the level of offense this could possibly cause a Black woman. Our relationship could have been strained and possibly destroyed in those moments, but she gave me a second chance and allowed me to be in her life. Now we consider each other family.

The insights during my time of avoiding white people and men were hard things to learn. I went home to my family and tried to distance them from myself as well. Anything that was being said, I was looking for the mistake. I was looking for the sexism, heterosexism, or racism in every single interaction. My awareness level was on high, and my acceptance level was completely low. I didn't care what the story of the person I was analyzing was. They were simply a part of my ethnographic research, which would inevitably tell me what I had supposed would happen: white people are racist, men are sexist, if a woman doesn't think she is being oppressed she is wrong, etc.

The insight I gained from this was that it didn't make me feel good. I had my friends and my professors at SIT to help me through it, to process some of the

conversations, to validate my experience (which did not happen at home), but still I was left feeling empty. I was left feeling as if I had no idea where I came from, but yet I was trying to establish where I should go. I didn't accept who I was, yet I was more than willing to tell someone else who they should be. I couldn't admit or own my own faults and imperfections, but I was jumping at the chance to see those same imperfections in others. What I learned from this process was that privilege has a way of sneaking its way into your behavior and thoughts even when you are constantly trying to be aware of and fight against it. *The reality is that since privilege (of any kind) is so deeply engrained within all of us and manifests itself unconsciously so often, we must be open to the notion that even in our efforts to destroy it, we will be using and benefiting from it, and that that very fact might be blocking our progress toward liberation for everyone.* Of course I could choose to isolate myself from those like me. But it takes a certain level of privilege even to do this. (I agree that so much of the problem with social justice is that people cannot make their concepts and ideas come to life within their own communities, so anti-racist white people often times find themselves organizing with other white people almost exclusively, this is of course problematic).

I think what I am trying to say is that we cannot work for social justice without coming to understand ourselves. If we talk about groups of people as if they are outside of ourselves (men, white people, straight people, etc.) then we will continue to benefit and maintain whatever privilege that we hold inside of ourselves, while at the very same time we are outwardly trying to destroy the system of privilege. This does not benefit us, it does not benefit those experiencing oppression from these systems and it does not benefit others who could potentially join in the struggle for liberation, even if they don't

know it yet. Everyone has a story, everyone has pain and everyone struggles. If we do not recognize this, then we will continue separating ourselves. This does not mean that Black people need to cater to the struggles and pain of white people in conversations about race. Quite the contrary actually, white people need to work with other whites and try to understand one another, so that when we come to the table to have the conversation about how to fight against racism, we will be adequately prepared and aware of our own issues.

Conclusion

While I have described many insights that I have gained in reference to facilitation and training, my deepest learning this year was about myself. Certainly, those things (my social identity and my identity as a trainer) are connected and cannot be detached from one another. That might be the most important insight I have gained – there can be no training without the trainer, there can be no trainer without social identity and therefore, we need to understand these connections deeply in order to understand what words like facilitation and training really mean.

In the end I do not have any earth-shattering concluding remarks, or any answers. What I leave this experience with are more questions, more reflection and the constant need for being critical of myself and those around me, while simultaneously hearing my own story as well as those stories around me, and listening with a desire to understand and relate to the world around me with love and compassion (the critical kind!).

I leave you with these ideas that I am trying to work on everyday –

See yourself in your participants.

Meet people where they are, but don't lose yourself in that journey.

Hear their story.   Tell yours.

Listen to understand.   Listen to care.

Appendix A

Guilford College White Caucus: 2012-2013

Mission Statement

This group will attempt to create a space where we can learn more about white identity. We will aim to bring new people into the anti-racism work/movement and discuss what it means to be an ally. This space will be one where we can share our struggles in terms of race and racial identity, while we try to alleviate the common problem in anti-racism work where People of Color are constantly educating white people about race and racism. We will discuss and analyze common problems and experiences we have with race and racial relations on a daily basis. As a group we will discuss how to intervene in situations of overt or covert racism. We will also delve into how we talk about race and whiteness, especially with our friends, family and loved ones. We will strategize for how to build less oppressive classroom and professional spaces. At its core the white caucus will be a space to try to reclaim our humanity as white people, by discussing what it means for us to be white and to be anti-racist.

Personal Testimonies

These questions were e-mailed out to participants who frequently appeared at either white caucus throughout the year. The responses are anonymous.

What did the space provided at the white caucus give to you? Did it help your process at all? If so, in what ways?

-Further realization of my own denial of privilege. New perspective on loving my fellow human beings.

- A lot of what I got was a lens into what students who are working on undoing racism are thinking about and seeing. It helped me process my own struggles to some extent (more on that below) and it helped me feel connected to students with less of the traditional classroom power dynamic. After a while, and especially after you challenged us one day, I thought that I needed to think about caucus as a meeting with homework. I decided to always have an intention for the week to work with and be able to report on in caucus. Unfortunately that was my last caucus for the semester but that focus is one I will bring back and try to keep up with without caucus.

What were some challenges you had at the white caucus?

-WHITE GUILT….tends to make me feel all whites are responsible for the self esteem issues of minorities in America.

- Often being the only prof there could be a hitch. I often felt that my age, experience and position at school put my needs and ways of communicating in a different place than

students. Also, my primary school-related processing needs around racism are classroom incidents and I don't feel appropriate speaking specificity about those situations in front of current students.

What are some ways that the white caucus can be improved?

-More predetermined questions or subject matter to be discussed…less adlibbing the agenda   i.e. "what would you like discuss today?")…. I am satisfied with a personal update by attendees…but the subject of discussion would allow us to come in prepared to speak.

- The best white caucus this semester for me was the one in which you called us all out for basically avoiding a direct question you put to the room. You are great at asserting yourself in a gentle and disarming way. I think it's good for the caucus to have a facilitator who prompts, challenges and redirects.

I think a faculty/staff caucus would have real value. Faculty who I would tell about the caucus often said they didn't want students in the room. That may indeed be an excuse! Still I really see the point of being able to talk specifically about these situations among colleagues. Jada's eggshell moments workshop could have turned into a caucus and gone on for hours. I could see people needing to share and having more to say than the format could afford. I see the merits of both of faculty/staff, of faculty/staff/student and of student only white caucus and the obvious issue seems like getting the numbers to make those separations work.

What did you appreciate about the white caucus?

-Nick's leadership and communication!   WELL DONE!

-Getting to know you better!

I have liked the opportunity to share experiences and hear from others.

I liked to be able to say to a white person who was struggling with something that there is a white caucus and its open for participation. Not that anyone (to my knowledge) followed through on that!

Any other feedback about the facilitation/organization of the caucus.

-I'm an organization and facilitation loving person. I think even us white folks who want to focus on undoing our own racism would often rather drift into tangential conversations that are more comfortable. Our intentions are good but having someone in the room whose role it is to listen and encourage depth, honesty and struggle is a great asset. I have informal conversations all the time. Caucus is a formal group and I think it is fair

for it to have more formalities. Also, or more to the point, more reminders of those formalities that we established at the beginning.

Caucus seems to have a middle to upper class leaning. I dont exactly know what to do about this but it would be cool for the caucus to look less like "natural" social groups that are already communicating informally. I'm thinking specifically about white student athletes who in my experience have such a different experience of race and racism because they are more apt to have close relationships and certainly collaborations with people of color. Also CCE folks who are a little more world wise. Just fantasizing here! But I bet there is a way to be more inclusive with our exclusively white group and would love to help think through that.

Appendix B

Personal Reflections on the White Savior Industrial Complex

3/12/2013

Do you need privilege to destroy privilege?

As I have gotten into social justice work around identity (in particular white identity and its effects on racism) I have noticed certain trends about where conversations about privilege and oppression happen. I have also noticed which types of people have these realizations (especially around their own privilege) and I am very interested to learn more about this phenomenon.

The story comes out again. Today I was talking to Person A and we discussed something that enabled her to be able to shift and move around issues of racial identity and privilege. She told me that a big moment she had in realizing what privilege might be, or why it is important to fight against racism came when see was in Thailand on a voluntourism (is what she called it) trip, doing service work. The realization was one similar to the one I had, the one Person B had, the one Person C had and the one many other white people have who experience another culture (especially if they are in a poor or underdeveloped area) and the ways in which it impacts their worldview and their personal culture.

But these trips and these realizations are actually embedded and drenched with privilege. The service trip Person A went on was almost entirely white people. When I was traveling through Laos and Thailand, I spend most of my time with other white people (Australians, Swedes, Brits, etc.). I am not saying that people of color don't travel and have that desire to do so, but because of the intersections of race and class it has made access to trips and going abroad much more difficult for people of color in the US. This is part of the privilege. Another part of the privilege comes with access to education, resource and knowledge about different options to go abroad and do service related trips. Again, I am not claiming that this is exclusively a white thing, but there are definite moments and experiences of privilege embedded within these experiences. It also is in part an ideological construct. What I mean to say by this is that as white people we have been made to believe that we are superior to those who are not white. This

extends into the international realm, of course, and has since the early days of colonialism.

The white savior complex did not just appear out of nowhere. It has been socially constructed within white people since Europeans came to the Americas, Africa and Asia and started pillaging people and resources for their own material benefit. Because of this history it is embedded into our psychology that it is okay, in fact it is recommended and advised to go outside of our cultural context in order to learn, become more cultured (this is of course a racist concept as white people have just as much culture as people who are not white) and to teach and help those who are less fortunate than us. Especially as white US Americans the privilege that people have been describing to me comes out as part of US American Exceptionalism and thinking that we have the ability to bring other "up to our level."

How can we rectify this? Now, all of the people I mentioned (and surely many others like them) have had realizations about their own ideas and behaviors and maybe have even tried changing their communities to begin deconstructing white supremacy. There is some movement within us anti-racist white folks to do good. This type of realization about just how privileged we are and just how privilege influence and impacts us is more nuanced and hopefully used for deeper and more radical social change both within the individuals themselves and on more broad social levels. What does this mean that we needed to use our privilege, leave our own cultural context and see different ways in which people live in order to realize our own contributions to racism and US imperialism? What are the steps to begin debunking this within ourselves? Can we reasonably expect others to not take the same steps as us if we are all trying to get to similar places? These are all questions that constantly float through my head and I am always open to hearing what ideas people might have. Or, for that matter, other questions that will be helpful in our search for truth, justice and solidarity.

Appendix C

Soy Un Lider Reflection

Workshop Facilitation

Jorge approached me sometime last week and asked me if I would be available to do a workshop during Soy Un Lider. Of course, I jumped at the chance, without even knowing what I was getting myself into.

About a week passed after this conversation and I found myself on Friday evening putting nametags into their holders, and not worrying about my workshops (this is in part because of the sentiment from above). Before I was getting ready to go home, I asked Jorge what he thought. He gave me two options and then we decided that Josh had better keep the workshop he was doing because he had already planned it. We spoke for about 15 minutes on the topic of my workshop. It was titled "College Prep" and basically what I needed to do was facilitate a workshop that would enable these students to best prepare themselves for applying to colleges based on what they are doing in high school. This is for classes, sports, other extracurriculars, community engagement, etc. Jorge and I spoke

for a bit, I offered a potential activity I could do, and Jorge liked it, thought it would be good, and we parted ways.

Each workshop would be 50 minutes and I would do 4 workshops. Not only was I at Guilford until 10:30pm, but I was also housesitting, so I needed to get up at 6am and feed and walk the dog I was looking after and then go to Guilford to help set up for the day. There were ample volunteers there, so I didn't need to do too much during the morning for set up, but I was available to help the whole time. As the time for the first workshop came near, I took my notebook out and wrote down a few key points I wanted to touch on. I wrote these five concepts:

Engaged
Consistency
Well-rounded
Challenge yourself
Initiative

These were some ideas that Jorge and I had talked about and others that I had come up with during my thinking about college prep in the hours before the workshop. This ended up being the foundation of my workshop and I took different variations on them throughout the day as the needs of the participants called for.

Workshop 1 was a bit shorter than 50 minutes, and turned out to be only 30 minutes. I went through these five concepts and asked the students if I knew what they meant by them before explaining. During the first workshop, I would explain the concept and then try to give an example. The students seemed like they were grasping the concepts, but they also seemed like they were a bit bored by the ways the information was being presented.

Jorge and I had discussed me putting together some things to focus on for the first 30 minutes of the workshop and then leaving the remaining time for questions. Although I tired to do this, it was evident after the first workshop, that these students were not going to have 20 minutes worth of questions. Because of this we needed to create ways to engage with the students more and take some time out of the block with productive thinking and reflecting. One method for this was volunteer engagement. Each group had two group leaders who were Guilford college students. During my first workshop Person A, one of the group leaders, gave her take on what she needed to do to prepare for college. She had answered one of the student's questions. At this point I realized a wealth of knowledge and experience that was in the room with me. Leticia spoke only for a minute or two, but the presence of another voice, a Latina women, and a current college student, gave a whole new energy and lens on the content that had been presented. I tried to bring the workshop to a close by pointing out some of the things Person A had said in the context of the five concepts we had already discussed.

For each of the workshops I would do a mini-needs assessment in the beginning. I would ask who was in high school and who was in middle school. Then I would ask for a show of hands as to who was in what grade. This gave me a sense of what types of students I was working with. Additionally, I asked about what they had learned and what other workshops they had been to, in an effort to substantiate the knowledge they had gained during the day and to avoid repetition.

During the second workshop both of the group leaders gave their experience and took turn answering different questions. In particular there was one student who asked about whether or not she said switch from her arts high school to another school that was an IB school. One of the group leaders went to an arts school for high school, the other went to an IB school. I was quiet during this conversation as the experience in the room was being shared. The second workshop didn't see too much adaptation on my part as I was only using the added human resources that I learned from the first workshop.

The third workshop was the one where I best applied my on-the-go facilitation skills. This was the block right before lunch and it was a seemingly energetic crew. Because of these two facts I knew I had to alter my design and facilitating. With this group the conversation in the beginning was quite energetic. I knew at least 4 or 5 people in this room would comment on basically anything I said. I needed to use this for the advantage of the whole group. After introducing myself and telling who I was and how I got to this point (something I did not do in the first workshop), I told the group I had five suggestions for ways to prepare themselves for college.

The next on the go activity was one of my favorites: Everyone split up and found either a partner or a group of three. The discussion question was: if you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go and why? Because the question was one that anyone could pretty much answer enthusiastically it created decent conversations and the energy immediately picked up. Only one person was supposed to be talking and the others were supposed to be listening. After about a minute long conversation (with a switch in the middle for who was talking/listening) the group came back together. After some preliminary asking about where people wanted to go, we spoke about how the person speaking knew the other person was engaged. This was a lead-in to the conversation about being engaged in their high school or potentially college community. What this was able to accomplish (I hope) is to give the students some idea of what I meant by engagement, so they didn't just need to accept my definition of it. Also, it could allow the students to see the different conceptions of engagement and how it could be applied on different levels.

The next concept was a similar activity. The question was discuss a hobby or something you like to do that you have been doing for over one year. This was a way to introduce the idea of consistency. And for the first time all day, I used an example: I said something along these lines, "I my freshman year I play soccer, and the next year I quit soccer and start band, and the next year I quit band and start student council, and my last year I stop student council and join the Spanish club, is this consistent?" I was trying to use an obvious opposite example to illuminate the meaning of the word. I am not sure, but all of the students seemed to guess that this was not consistent, which in my interpretation means that they have some understanding of the term consistency.

Something else I added during this workshop was some element of applying the new knowledge. Although it was difficult for me to do this in such a short workshop time period (and one where I wanted to leave a lot of time for questions), I was able to ask some questions at the end as to what ways they might apply this knowledge. Basically the question I asked was, "based on these things we have discussed, what are some ways you could possibly prepare yourself for college in the next few years of high school?" There were mostly pretty generic answers, or vague answers, like "be more

engaged!" They were trying to use what we had spoken about and I think on some level they understood, but it was a bit difficult to get to this application piece.

The fourth workshop had a similar feel to the third, but we ended a bit early and played a game. This was the workshop were during the middle of it a few students asked if they could touch my beard, so I walked around the classroom letting people touch my face. I love my job.

In general, I think that I am, on some level, internalizing the experiential learning cycle. Although this workshop could not be entirely experiential based on the conditions under which it was done, there were still elements of the cycle in all of the workshops I facilitated. I was constantly searching to see what experiences were in the room, and typically we would brainstorm ways students were involved in the beginning of the workshop. This was a way to get some experience out into the room and assess the needs in the room at the same time.

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