

Authentic Interactions

Personal Self-Survey

Facilitator's Notes

Caution - As you facilitate this exercise, please be careful to recognize and be prepared to discuss three important issues:

1. ***In a mixed race dialogue this exercise can easily become a situation in which people of color end up being put into a teaching role. Please be sure to acknowledge that relying on people of color to be the teachers can reinforce old patterns wherein white people don't take up the responsibility to teach each other. Please tell people of color in the space that you are aware of this dynamic and are hoping to avoid it. That said, if the people of color in the space would like to offer their suggestions that should not be discouraged.***
2. ***These notes are meant to support facilitators helping white people learn about their approaches so they can make considered choices when deciding to name race issues. Yet, this survey has also been designed so that people of color can answer the questions in a way that would be true for them. All participants should be encouraged to discover new insights regarding their feelings and actions.***
3. ***This exercise offers one very specific context. People's feelings and actions may shift markedly depending upon the context. If participants recognize that their answers to this survey would change if the context were different, let them know that this is normal and does not necessarily imply that they are being "inauthentic" by using different approaches in different situations. If this issue arises, it is a good opportunity for the participants to explore what about certain situations make them feel more or less inclined to feel or behave in a certain way.***

1. Imagine that you are attending a social gathering wherein you expect to know only the host and a few additional people. All the people you anticipate knowing in the room are white. As you walk into the room, you see that there is a person of color sitting alone at a nearby table looking at something resting on her lap. Everyone else you see at the event appears to be white. Some people are seated, while others are standing in groups talking. The host makes an announcement that there are 30 minutes until food will be served.

- What feelings arise when you consider the racial make-up of the situation?
- Would you feel obligated to approach the person of color sitting at the table to introduce yourself?
 - Why or why not?
 - What experiences have you had that lead you to feeling as you do?

Often white people who have recently become conscious of the prevalence of racism will fall into a patronizing form of caretaking for people of color. While it is friendly to approach any person and offer a personal introduction, it is important for white people to question their motivations and what are feelings are related to this. There are no correct answers to these questions.

- If you did engage the person of color in conversation, would you mention your observation about how the vast majority of participants are white?
 - Why or why not?
 - What would be the pros and cons of naming the racial make-up of the situation?

Some find it valuable when white people are able to name the situation and demonstrate their understanding that predominantly white spaces can be challenging. However, this is not always the case.

Some pros: Naming the situation highlights that we're attentive to race issues.

Some cons: Bringing race into the conversation might not be welcome by people who are constantly barraged by the impacts of racism.

It's always a risk if we do not know the person we're approaching. No way around it.

- Would you be likely to observe and/or name the racial make-up of the situation when speaking with other white attendees?
 - Why or why not?
 - What would be the difference, if any, between naming your observations to white attendees versus people of color?

If we feel more obligated to mention the racial dynamics in the room to people of color than to white people, we need to ask why?

Do we feel like we're helping out the people of color by naming it?

Are we hesitant to name it to white people because we fear they will respond badly?

Overall, as a practice, it's never bad to become someone who introduces him/herself to others. It's also really good practice to start naming the racial dynamics we see playing out. But, white people will benefit greatly if we take this up as part of a practice of improving the ability to use our voice and NOT see it as a way to take care of people of color. In other words, we choose to approach people and name these issues to ANYONE because doing so increases OUR leadership abilities as people trying to witness for racial justice.

2. At some point during this event someone says something that could easily be perceived as racist, or at least disrespectful, toward people of color. It is sure that the entire room heard the comment.
 - What would you do?
 - What factors would inform that choice?
 - What feelings arise as you think about that situation?

It would be really nice if there were easy answers to these questions. However, there are not. Every situation has its own complexity. An important thing to keep in mind is that EVERY person is an individual and will have his or her own opinion regarding what you should or should not do. While really valuable to check in with people you know who can offer guidelines to keep in mind, ultimately, if your choice is based around what you think another person wants you to do, you are likely to feel demoralized when your approach doesn't match that person's interest. Essential is that we grapple with these questions and come to decisions that are grounded in our understanding of both our intent and what will help us use our voice in effective ways to achieve that intention.