



Working with—not for— white fragility

March 25, 2017

Blink Consulting

Working agreements

- Confidentiality
 - “Yes, and...”
 - Make this useful



White Fragility

June 7
6:30-8:30 pm
Glaser Center
547 Mendocino Ave.
Santa Rosa

*Did you just
say RACE?*



A Dialog
Sponsored by the Racial Justice
Allies of Sonoma County.
For information:
racialjusticeallies@gmail.com or
Judy Helfand
707-833-1890.
Wheelchair accessible

White fragility: Actually quite durable

A product of the expectation of racial comfort and exemption from racial stress that white privilege affords to white-identified and identifying people, “white fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial [privilege] equilibrium” (DiAngelo, 2011).



In order to work growthfully with (not perpetually for) white privilege:

- We need to figure out how to be effective, not just right (Crutchfield, 2013)
- We need to be able to recognize and name white fragility
- We need tools and language to respond to defenses we can reasonably expect: “But there’s not a racist bone in my body!”
- We need to be able to name racism and to call each other and ourselves—on racist language and actions
- We need to de-personalize what isn’t personal



What is whiteness?

Race and ethnicity



Often used interchangeably, race is linked fundamentally to phenotype, while ethnicity is defined primarily through geography and lived or claimed cultural heritage.

- **Race** is an aspect of identity based on ancestry, phenotype and social context. Like ethnic groups, racial groups can evolve shared identities and experiences. Race, like gender, is a socially constructed identity based on an interpretation of biology.
- **Ethnicity** is an aspect of identity based on ancestry, region, appearance and cultural artifacts (such as language, religion, and styles of food and clothing).

White: A working definition

White is a racial identity that is based on phenotype, ancestry and social context. While white cultures vary by region (that is, there are different white ethnic identities), white racial identity has evolved some common experiences, perspectives and social status across those cultures.



Is it better to say “Caucasian”?



“Caucasian” as a regional term includes the people of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Russia, Turkey and the partially and unrecognized states of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Privilege: a working definition

Unearned social advantage in the form of:

- entitlement to resources and opportunities;
- preferential treatment;
- or immunity from stigma, obligation, expectation or threat

that is tacitly, automatically activated for members of a particular identity group.

* “Right Hand of Privilege” concept from Steven Jones



Privilege just is.

Your intention and feelings about your privilege don't change the fact of it.

But you can choose how you wield it, and how it impacts others.

Racial and racist: Rectangles and squares

Anything that has to do with race is *racial*.

Something *racial* becomes *racist* when it perpetuates systemic prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination.

Racism, defined

Racial discrimination + cultural/institutional power = racism

While any individual or group can discriminate against any other individual or group on the basis of race, **racism** comprises attitudes, beliefs, actions, speech and policies that reinforce and are backed by social norms and institutional power that perpetuate bias, discrimination, and inequity on the basis of racial identity.

Note: An individual's speech or actions does not require intention or consciousness to still have **racist** impact.



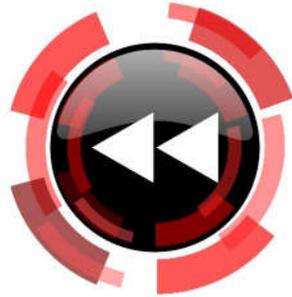
It's actually true when someone says "there's not a racist bone" in their body.

Because there *is* no racism bone.

Racism is perpetuated by what we *do* and *say*, not *who we are*. Which is fortunate, because we can choose our actions and speech, not the bones we're born with.



Reverse racism?



While any individual or group can discriminate racially against any other individual or group racism is discrimination that is backed by cultural norms and institutional power. Thus “reverse racism” is only possible *if you reverse entire existing systems of institutionalized racial prejudice and discrimination.*

Perceived “reverse racism” may be a symptom of the discomfort an individual or group experiences when normative racial privilege doesn’t fully immunize them from situational bias, prejudice and discrimination.

What do you say when someone
has just said/done something
racist?

When you need to call someone on what they said

(Smooth, 2008; Wiseman 2009)

- Decide whether you want to be **right** or **effective** in this conversation
- Decide what you want for this **relationship**
- Then focus on **what** the person said, not **who** they are
- Acknowledge “yes, and...” (what was unintended/innocent **and** what was discriminatory)



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Intention

and (not or) impact



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How do you respond when someone tells *you* that you've just said/done something racist?

Having a challenging conversation

(Blink, 2010; Wiseman, 2009)

- Notice your gut response. What are you feeling, thinking and inclined to do?
- What's your intention? What do you hope?
- Discern if it's safe (versus uncomfortable) for you to proceed, or when/where would be.
- Try “yes, and...”
 - Consider how it's possible that what you just said/did is racist.
 - Offer to share your intention.
- Ask for suggestions, consider options.



White fragility makes sense.
Racism *is* overwhelming.

How do we get past feeling overwhelmed,
so that we can actually do something about
racism?

Cold, hard data is hard to ignore... **Measurements enable you to create accountability and establish a baseline by which success or opportunities for improvement can be quantified.**

Measurements also serve to neutralize some of the emotion associated with diversity and inclusion topics.

“Metrics provide a common language we can understand and agree upon... **The focus is on the problem, instead of specific behaviors or people.**” —Rich Goldberg, VP of corporate quality

With **numbers** we get the attention of leaders, managers, and employees; with **conversations** we get the relevance and courage to lead change (Hoffman et al., Cisco Systems, 2015).



Inclusion and equity by community voice: Hurdles to clear

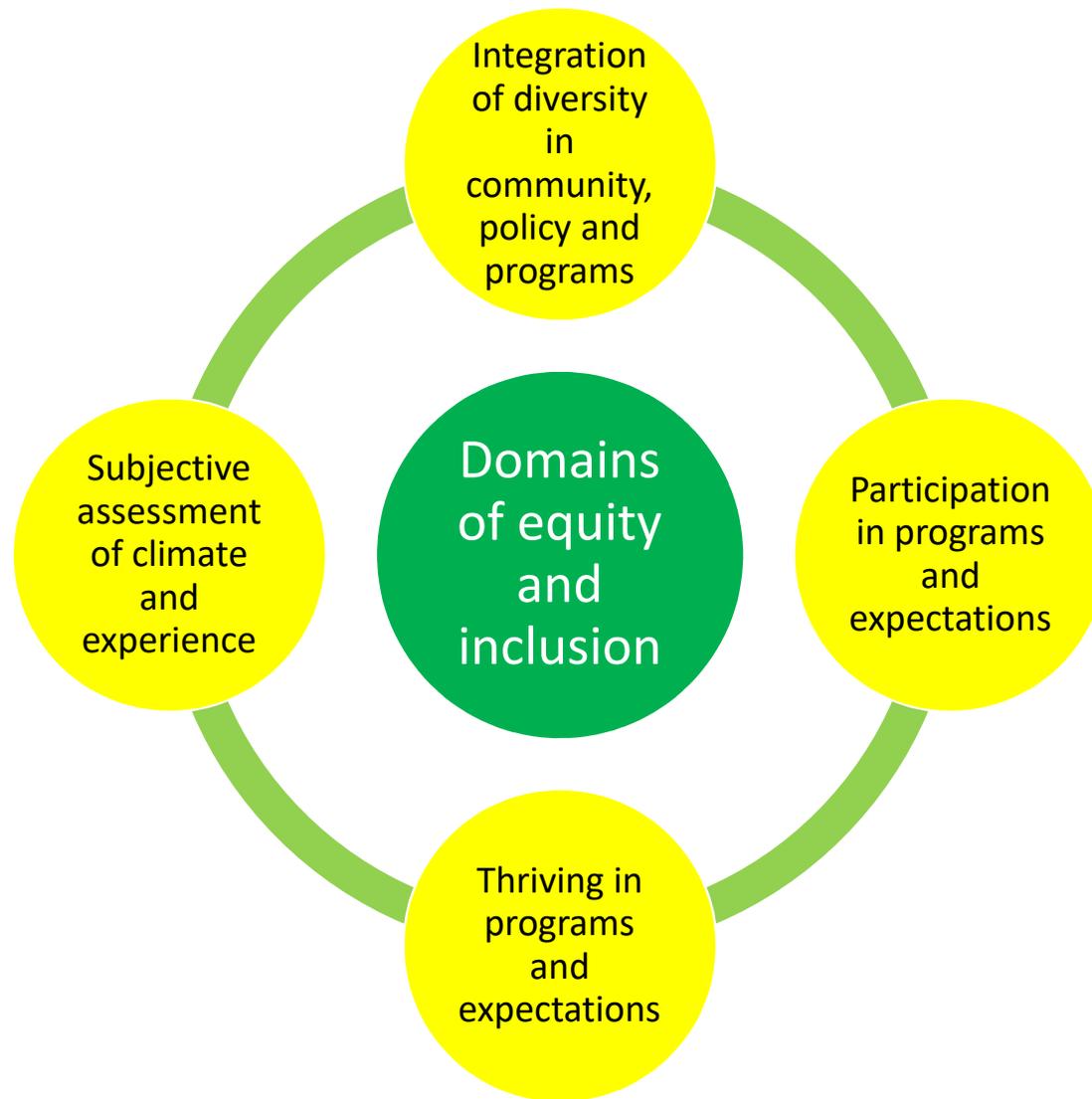


→ Against the flow of privilege →

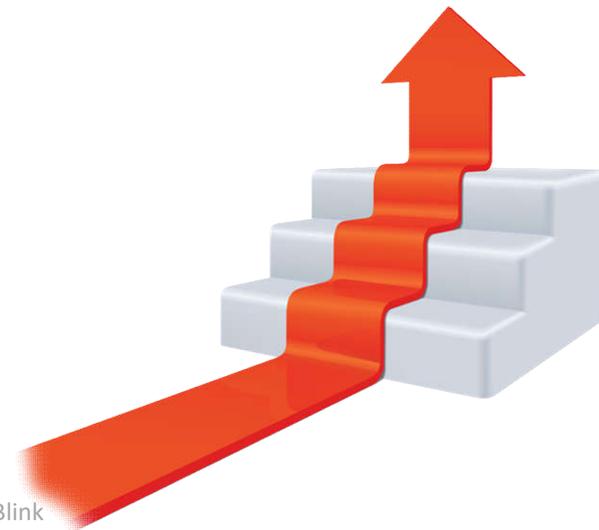
Assessing racial DEI effectively

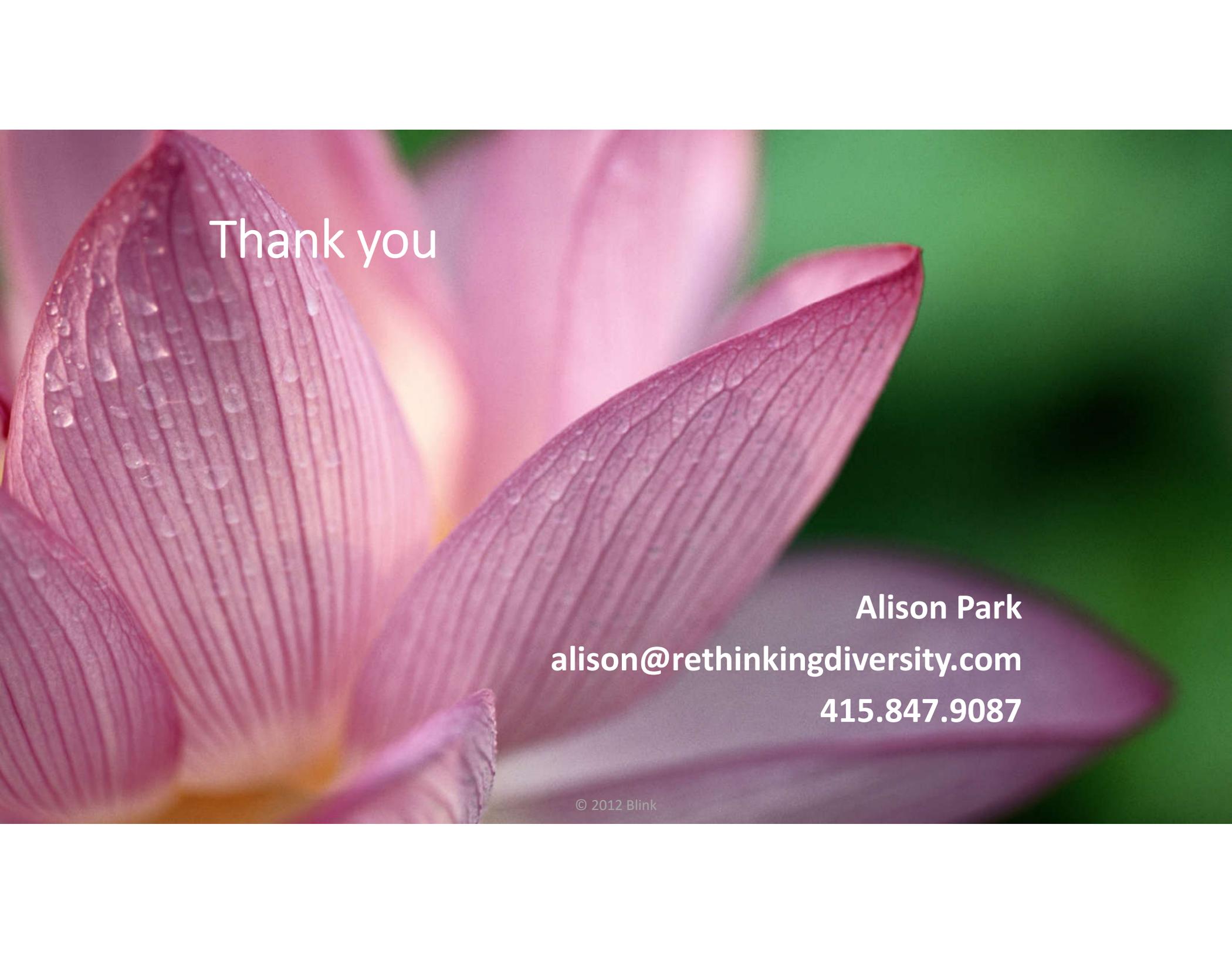


- Establish ownership: Why is racial DEI an institutional priority?
- Educate community to purpose, expectations and language
- Clarify focus and direction: What's the vision?
- Articulate growth indicators: What are the benchmarks of progress, so you know:
 - How you're doing now
 - Whether you're advancing toward articulated goals
 - What policies, programs and people are most impactful
- Commit to ongoing, periodic assessment and strategic adjustment



Assessing racial DEI
can help break through white fragility,
in order to dismantle **racism**.





Thank you

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