# Biased Behaviors That Perpetuate Racist Dynamics and Structural Racism

As you review the list of behaviors below:

* Check off any dynamics and behaviors you have observed from white people.
* Circle the # of any that you have personally done at any time in your life.

\*After you’ve read through the list and marked it, follow the directions below the list for additional reflection.

**Some People, Particularly White People, Tend to (consciously and unconsciously):**

1. Interrupt and talk over People of Color in meetings and casual conversations more frequently than white colleagues.
2. Minimize, undervalue, ignore, overlook, and discount the talents, competencies, and contributions of People of Color.
3. Rephrase and reword the comments of People of Color much more frequently than those of white colleagues.
4. Ask People of Color to repeat what they have just said far more often than white colleagues.
5. Question, challenge, and doubt the validity and credibility of what People of Color say far more often than with white colleagues.
6. Require and demand proof if People of Color raise concerns about racist dynamics.
7. Question and undermine the authority of leaders of color; resent taking direction from a Person of Color.
8. Do not follow the direction of leaders, managers, and facilitators of color.
9. Walk on eggshells, act more hesitant, distant, and formal with People of Color; feel uncomfortable and nervous and do not develop the same depth of effective working relationships for fear of saying or doing something racist.
10. When asked to examine the impact of their behavior, get defensive and argue their “good intent” rather than explore the negative racist impact of their action or inaction.
11. Focus on how much progress has been made, rather than on how much more needs to change.
12. Diminish and downplay the reality of recent racist behaviors and incidents by expressing shock and dismay — “I can’t believe this is still happening in \_\_\_\_\_\_ (year)”— to avoid further exploration of the negative impact on People of Color.
13. Respond impatiently when People of Color raise concerns and issues of racism; move on quickly to another topic.
14. Get defensive when People of Color express their frustrations with current organizational and societal dynamics.
15. Get angry if People of Color don’t enthusiastically appreciate when white people are trying to “help” them.
16. Engage in tone policing of People of Color; pressure them to soften their tone, not be so emotional and angry, to smile and be nice, be more professional, be more palatable, etc.
17. Make racist comments during hiring practices, including: We have to hire a Person of Color, regardless of their qualifications; we need to find more qualified People of Color; they won’t be a good fit here; they won’t stay; they were too aggressive in their comments; they seemed to have an attitude; all they talked about was race; they don’t have the right degree or the right experience for this job; I’m not sure about their research focus; etc.
18. Try to teach People of Color about racism; “white-splaining.”
19. Play the white savior: try to “help” People of Color, give unsolicited advice, rush to fix and solve issues on their own for People of Color.
20. Proclaim “I’m not racist!” while refusing to acknowledge the patterns of interpersonal, cultural, and institutional racism People of Color experience daily.
21. Rationalize away racist treatment of People of Color as individual racist incidents, a misunderstanding, or the result of something the Person of Color did or failed to do.
22. Refuse to recognize racist dynamics and dismiss the racist experiences of People of Color with comments such as: That happens to me too. You’re too sensitive. That happened because of\_\_\_\_\_—it has nothing to do with race!
23. Look to and demand their colleagues of color be the diversity expert and take the lead in raising and addressing racism as their second (unpaid) job.
24. Seek and/or demand approval, validation, and recognition from People of Color.
25. After a meeting, tell People of Color how awful something was but don’t do anything to actually address the microaggression or problematic behavior in the moment or afterwards with the person responsible.
26. Refuse to acknowledge and continue to minimize the devastating emotional labor and racial trauma their colleagues of color experience in the organization and in society.
27. Dismiss what People of Color say. Accept same types of comments as valid when stated by a white person.
28. Look to a white person to validate the comments and ideas of a Person of Color.
29. Look to People of Color (especially when it is not within a paid position description or outlined within the person’s job responsibilities and duties) for direction, education, and coaching on how to act and what not to do related to any issue of race or racial equity.
30. Discount, critique, question, and outright ignore the insights, coaching, and direction from People of Color in leadership roles related to racial equity.
31. Are performative; say they support racial equity while still perpetuating and/or ignoring racist dynamics, policies, and practices. Often focused on being perceived as the “good white person” versus addressing racism.
32. Believe they are already “woke” (effective allies/accomplices) and resist further education and accountability.
33. When asked to examine their white privilege, get defensive and use perfectly logical explanations (PLEs) and justifications for remaining in resistance.
34. Assume the white teacher/coach/facilitator/employee, etc., is in charge, a competent leader; assume People of Color are in service and support roles.
35. Seem surprised when a Person of Color makes a useful comment or offers an insightful idea; calls them “articulate.”
36. Do not notice or outright ignore the daily racist indignities, microaggressions, and systemic racism that People of Color and Indigenous Peoples experience.
37. Use PLEs (Perfectly Logical Explanations) to minimize, dismiss, and rationalize any racist microaggressions or other racist dynamic.
38. Dismiss and minimize the frustrations of People of Color and Indigenous Peoples; label the person raising issues as aggressive, angry, having an attitude, working their agenda, not a team player, unprofessional, etc.
39. Judge and critique People of Color as overreacting, too emotional, extreme in their reactions, and unprofessional when they are responding to the cumulative impact of racist incidents.
40. Accuse People of Color of playing the race card whenever they challenge racist policies and practices; refuse to explore the probability of negative differential impact based on race or how racist attitudes and beliefs are operating in the dynamic.
41. If confronted by a Person of Color, shut down and focus on what to avoid saying or doing in the future, rather than engaging and learning from the interaction.
42. If confronted by a Person of Color, view it as an “attack” and focus on and critique HOW they engaged, not the original problematic comments or behaviors.
43. If confronted by a Person of Color, use tears to distract from the conversation and re-center themselves to avoid accountability.
44. Disengage when they feel any anxiety or discomfort; blame People of Color if they feel uncomfortable.
45. Demand to always feel comfortable and have “safe space” when talking about issues of race. Avoid conflict and seek harmony above truthful conversations about race/racism.
46. Profess feelings of deep guilt and shame without taking meaningful action to interrupt racist attitudes, behaviors, policies, and practices.
47. Defend white colleagues who are confronted about the racist impact of their behavior with comments like: “He’s a good guy and would never mean that and would never do that.” “She has biracial kids.” “They’re married to a Black person.” “He is part Native American! You must have misunderstood.”
48. Work to maintain the status quo and protect the advantages and privileges they receive as a white person.
49. Believe and insist they know what is best for others and, given their power and privileged status, feel they are entitled to make decisions without inclusive input of those impacted or charged with implementing them.
50. Create, maintain, and enforce work environments based on white cultural norms, practices and values.
51. Insist there is one right way, meaning “my way” or the white way.
52. Claim to not know how to consistently use or outright refuse or fail to consistently use a Race Lens in decision-making and planning to create greater racial equity.
53. Claim to not know how to consistently use or outright refuse to consistently use a Race Lens to analyze and revise current practices, policies, programs, norms, and services to create greater racial equity.
54. Give white colleagues continuous coaching and developmental feedback to help them be successful, often with the thought that “they remind me of myself.” Fail to develop effective coaching relationships with People of Color or give useful, timely developmental feedback.
55. Critique the comments and behaviors of People of Color and discipline them far more often, more quickly, and more severely than white colleagues.
56. Give white people the benefit of the doubt if they make a misstep; hold People of Color to a far higher standard of performance.
57. Either make People of Color’s and Indigenous People’s experience (and/or their labor) invisible or scrutinize them under a microscope.
58. Avoid giving direct feedback to colleagues of color; instead, complain to the person’s supervisor and/or gossip with white peers.
59. Make comments that reinforce and perpetuate racist stereotypes about People of Color.
60. When confronted about the racist impact of their comment, respond defensively with comments, including: “That wasn’t what I said!” “I was only joking; you misunderstood me!” “That wasn’t my intent!”
61. Positively comment much more often on the skills and achievements of white colleagues and overlook those of People of Color.
62. Only compliment People of Color on their appearance, hair, and articulate speech while praising white colleagues on their performance and demonstrated competence.
63. Attribute the work of individual People of Color to the whole team, yet single out individual white people for public recognition and appreciation for their contributions, even if achieved through teamwork.
64. Take credit for the work of People of Color on their team.
65. Critique and chastise People of Color who do not conform and assimilate to white cultural norms and practices, e.g., call them unprofessional.
66. Accept and feel safer around People of Color who have assimilated and are “closer to white.”
67. Mentor, coach, sponsor, and promote People of Color they view as assimilated and are “closer to white.”
68. Refuse to acknowledge the existence of and cumulative impact of racist microaggressions.
69. Refuse to acknowledge the devastating, life threatening impact of systemic racism.
70. Blame People of Color for the racist barriers and challenges they experience.
71. Segregate themselves from People of Color and rarely develop authentic relationships across race.
72. Call security or law enforcement to confront People of Color who are just going about their daily lives. Weaponize security or law enforcement when they feel People of Color don’t belong where they are, shouldn’t be doing what they are doing, etc.
73. Exaggerate the level of intimacy they have with individual People of Color.
74. Use credentialing to try to prove they are a good white colleague, such as: My best friend is Black; I’m married to a Native American; I adopted a child from China; I majored in Latin American literature; I am bilingual in Spanish; my great grandfather was Cherokee; I have researched and written about issue of race and racism all my life; I teach about race and racism; I am active in local anti-racism organizations; I marched in Black Lives Matter protests; I have biracial children, etc.
75. Pressure and punish white people who actively work to dismantle racism to conform and collude with the status quo.
76. Criticize, gossip about, and find fault with white allies and change agents.
77. Compete with other whites to be the good white, the best ally, the one People of Color let into their circle, etc.
78. If a white person does or says something racist, aggressively confront them and pile on the critical feedback to distance from them and prove who is a better ally.
79. Avoid confronting other white people on their racist attitudes and behaviors ever and/or in the presence of People of Color.

After you’ve marked the list, add any additional common behaviors that perpetuate racist dynamics and organizational racism you have witnessed, experienced, or done. Then, review all of the racist behaviors ***you have observed*** and answer the following questions:

1. What is the probable impact of these behaviors?
2. What are three to five ways you could effectively interrupt and engage these dynamics in the moment?
3. How could you follow up afterwards?
4. What kinds of changes to policies, practices, and norms could you advocate for that could minimize these occurring in future?

Now, choose five to ten unproductive behaviors ***you have done*** and answer the following questions:

1. What could you have done instead that would have aligned with your core values and furthered organizational racial equity goals?
2. When asked to examine the racist impact of your behaviors, how could you have engaged more effectively to hear the feedback and take responsibility for your impact?

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