How does racism endure? How is it that the insane notion that whole groups of people are less than fully human because of a different phenotype or level of melanin in their skin comes to be conventional wisdom, common sense? Genetically there is far more that unites than divides us and the DNA of white Europeans and black Africans differs in no discernible way. So what causes large swathes of the white population to ascribe innately lower levels of intelligence and personality traits such as a propensity for violent criminality to black, brown, red and yellow people? And what stops communities of color from rising up in revolution?

The short answer to the second question is the paramilitary power of the state. As we wrote this chapter President Trump ordered the army down to the Mexican border to prevent a fictional invasion of a caravan of supposed drug dealers, gang members and tuberculosis carriers. Police departments around the country have become militarized in terms of their vehicles and armaments. White police officers can cite that they feared for their life as a justifiable reason for shooting dead any black person who they feel in some way is not acting ‘normally’.

The answer to the first question lies embedded in the long tradition of critical theory (Brookfield, 2004). The Frankfurt school of critical theory associated with thinkers such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse and Jurgen Habermas ascribe the mass acceptance of enduring inequality to ideological manipulation. Put simply, if you can get people to see the world in a certain way then they will keep themselves in line. You won’t need to bring military force onto the streets to control people’s behavior because they will do that themselves. If most people think that whites and men should be in control of making the major decisions on how resources should be allocated because whiteness and masculinity are equated with calm reasoning, the use of logic and objectivity unsullied by emotion or passion, then, as Rebecca Traister (2018) eloquently points out, white patriarchy runs the show.

**The Ideology of Individualism**

But it’s a particular ideology – that of individualism – that we want to examine in this chapter. Individualism as a dominant ideology in the United States comprises a set of beliefs and practices that help keep a blatantly unequal system in place. It comprises two core beliefs. The first is that we live on a roughly level playing field and that anyone can make what they want of their life by dint of their own perseverance and hard work. When parents tell their children that they can be anything they want to be this seems an optimistic and motivational message. It inspires children to visualize alternative futures. It inspires dreams and underscores the Horatio Alger mythology that anyone can life themselves up by their boot straps, pull their socks up, gird their loins and soar out into the world as a dynamic entrepreneur.

The second core belief is that we are in control of our individual destinies, captains of our souls. What we make of our lives is a result of the personal decisions we take at the significant turning points we all experience. The feelings, instincts, and intuitions that govern our actions are believed to be unique to us alone. Together they constitute our particular identity, the sole actor who maneuvers through the terrain of an individual life. At some deep level we see ourselves as disconnected from the settings, locations and people that surround us and creating our live as isolated actors self-directedly choosing our particular path.

This individualist emphasis is an enduring, deeply rooted and extremely powerful element of the American psyche, particularly for whites. It’s bound up with notions of individual liberty, the flag, freedom of speech, and lady Liberty waving in generations of hopeful immigrants and giving them the chance to make better lives for themselves. Archetypal figures such as the cowboy, the frontier settler, even the venture capitalist embody the notion that anyone can be President or the CEO of a global corporation.

Of course this is a *white* lie in that life chances are irrevocably tied to racial identity. So if you are white then the chances that you will be able to aspire to and create wealth are higher. The myth of individualism uses black exceptionalism – the successes of individuals of color from President Obama to Michael Jordan or Kanye West – to prove its truth. “Look at all these successful black politicians, media moguls and billionaire sports stars – they prove that anyone can be wildly successful irrespective of their race!”

In academe individualism runs rampant. Co-authored books and articles are granted less validity and credibility that those that are single authored. Testing and grading is conducted overwhelmingly in an individualistic way. Students may occasionally be graded as groups, but most are so embedded in individualist ideology that they resist this. Pedagogically, team teaching is regarded as easier than solo teaching, when in fact the opposite is the case. Planning curriculum, conducting instruction and evaluating learning are far simpler if you don’t have to consult with colleagues. If you do succeed in team teaching a course with one or two peers, you are likely to be awarded only half or a third of a course load for that particular class.

**Individualism and Racism**

An individualistic understanding of racism interprets this as a personal choice that white people decide to make, or avoid, on a day by day basis. When racism is perceived as a series of individual judgments and actions – today I was racist but yesterday I was not – then combatting racism becomes seen as a matter of personal fortitude. Whites can make a resolution to be on high alert for their own enactment of racial microaggressions, can vow to monitor their implicit biases, and strive to cut out racist jokes, tropes and stereotypes. Viewed this way, whites like the two of us can convince ourselves that real progress is being made, one person at a time.

We don’t want to dismiss these individual kinds of efforts as naïve. The two of us take them very seriously and try to work on ourselves in all the ways just described. But we’re also aware that seeing anti-racism as a matter of personal resolve obscures the systemic nature of the phenomenon. Individual acts of racism are the personal enactments of structural reality. White supremacy as an ideology and system ensures the continuing dominance of one racial group by portraying its exercise of control as an uncontestable and accidental empirical truth. In this perspective the fact that whites end up in positions of power and authority is not the result of systemic oppression, but just the way things are. The continuing disenfranchisement and marginalization of people of color is not seen as being linked to school district funding mechanisms, the specific design of intelligence tests, or redlining housing policies. The disproportionate levels of infant mortality or poor health care amongst communities of color is rarely tied to the fact that members of those communities piece together employment from two or three part-time jobs, none of which carry health benefits.

An anti-racist identity must focus on understanding racism as structural and systemic, and on a commitment to taking collective action to change those structures and systems. Work on your own racist habits, inclinations and biases is important and necessary, but it is only the beginning of a fully realized anti-racist identity. We must move from the personal to the collective, from the individual to the systemic. We must contribute to building movements, commit to furthering institutional and community initiatives that address inequity, and focus our energies on changing policies and structures. People come and go but structures and policies endure unless some collective effort disrupts them. In short, we need to think structurally, not individually.

In their analysis of the structural roots of implicit bias, Daumeyer, Rucker and Richeson (2017) argue that, “a model of implicit bias that situates its expression on situational factors, then, should be more acceptable to individuals” (p. 258). We have both observed this to be the case when working with whites to unearth learned racism. It seems that when biases, microaggressions and racist stereotypes are understood as socially and culturally learned rather than as originating in individual psyches, there is less embarrassment to owning up to them. If teachers and leaders disclose how they learned to think structurally and explain that a white supremacist view of the world comes from passing through structures and systems this can legitimize others going public with their own learned racism. When learning racism is presented and disclosed as a normal part of enculturation and socialization it seems to make it easier for people to talk about how it’s manifested in their own lives. The two of us often say that to grow up in a racist world and *not* to have learned racist conditioning would be very strange. So we try to normalize racism by presenting it not as a shameful personal moral defect but as a natural outcome of living every day in racist systems and structures.

**Beginning with Story: The Brain Fart**

People embedded in an individualist ideology and unused to thinking structurally will usually not react well to a program that begins with those in charge setting out a theoretical analysis. As we emphasized in chapter 3, we advocate beginning with story. But the stories with which we begin need to be analyzed using a structural frame. When teaching structural thinking people are encouraged to work backwards from a particular event and to see how specific actions are structurally framed.

The following is an example of a story that Stephen uses to lead participants into structural thinking.

*I was running what I thought was an effective student discussion one day in a university graduate class that was overwhelmingly white and mostly female. I considered the discussion as successful because it seemed that everybody was participating in roughly equal measure.*

*About thirty minutes into the class I raised a particular issue and asked everyone to contribute their thinking on the topic. A couple of students hesitantly ventured their initial thoughts and I practiced my usual waiting time until eventually everyone had spoken. The contributions were focused and thoughtful and I was pleased by the way the students had brought a variety of perspectives to the issue.*

*I began summarizing the main themes that I thought had emerged from the comments and I started to differentiate the contradictory views that I felt had been expressed.*

*Suddenly a white woman participant, Jenn, raised her hand.*

*“Excuse me, we haven’t heard from Mia,” she said.*

*Mia was a young Asian American woman and the thought that I had overlooked her was immediately embarrassing to me.*

*“I’m really sorry about that Mia,” I said. “I don’t know how that happened. My apologies, I don’t know how I missed you. Can we hear from you what you’re thinking about?”*

*Mia made her contribution and shortly afterwards we took a mid-class break.*

*I was still bothered and feeling embarrassed by my not noticing that Mia hadn’t spoken and as I brewed up some tea in my office close to the classroom I started to go over what had just happened.*

*It became obvious to me almost immediately that this was a classic example of a microaggression. Microaggressions occur when members of the dominant culture act unwittingly in ways that diminish, demean and marginalize members of minority groups. These actions are so subtle that the receivers are often left wondering ‘did that really happen?’ or ‘am I making too much of something? Am I imagining this?’*

*When challenged on their actions, those committing microaggressions usually respond by saying the person identifying the aggression is being too sensitive, making a mountain out of a molehill, or just misunderstanding what was said or meant. Members of the dominant culture then usually jump in to excuse and explain away the aggression, saying that it was a slip of the tongue, came out the wrong way, and that no harm was meant. This is often accompanied by character witness testimonials of how the aggressor doesn’t have a racist bone in their body, is a good person, and cares for all students.*

*The class resumed after break and I began by speaking about what had happened when I had overlooked Mia.*

*“I want to thank Jenn for bringing to my attention the fact that I completely overlooked Mia in class. What you’ve just witnessed is a classic example of a racial microaggression. I had no intent to exclude Mia from the discussion and no awareness of that happening. Yet when I thanked you all for contributing and began to summarize your comments I completely overlooked a woman of color. Microaggressions are the small acts of exclusion that whites often enact against people of color. They’re not deliberate or intentional and they happen with no wish to harm someone else. But that’s what happened when I didn’t notice that Mia hadn’t spoken and I went into my summary.”*

*Almost immediately the only white male member of the group, John, spoke up.*

*“You know Dr. Brookfield I think you’re being way too hard on yourself. You just had a forgetful moment. Not every action has to do with race. Sometimes you’re just tired. You just had a brain fart. I don’t think you should blame yourself. If we take this to the extreme we’re never going to be able to do or say anything without being thought of as racist.”*

*I thought it was beautifully ironic that John’s response captured a dynamic of microaggressions that I hadn’t previously talked about. His comments illustrated precisely how members of the dominant culture jump in to save others who they feel are being unjustly accused. I, not Mia, had been the one to name my own microaggression, and yet John had felt compelled to jump in and save me from myself.*

*I told John that he had just exemplified a very predictable dynamic that happens of whites trying to excuse other whites who are called on their microaggressions.*

*John seemed offended by my comments. “Well, it’s obvious I can’t say anything in this course without being called a racist!” he exclaimed. “This is clearly not a safe space for me so I’m just going to shut up.”*

*Just then Mia spoke up.*

*“This is not the first time this has happened to me,” she said, her voice quavering. “In every class I’ve been in at this institution I feel I’ve been systematically ignored. It’s like people don’t see me or think I’m in the room.”*

**Coding the Story**

Here’s how we get students to connect a story such *The Brain Fart* to thinking structurally about this particular situation.

We begin by handing out the story to people so everyone has a written record they can study. People are asked to spend five minutes carefully reading the story. They are told to answer the three questions below:

* What events or actions in the story demonstrate the presence of white supremacy as both an ideology or set of practices?
* How is the specific location of the story affected by wider structures, systems and forces?
* Whose interests inside and outside the specific location of the story are served or harmed by what is described?

After completing their responses to the questions above people share their responses in small groups. The whole workshop, class or meeting then reconvenes and we hear what people have talked about.

Here’s how the discussion of *The Brain Fart* might go.

**What events or actions in the story demonstrate the presence of white supremacy as both an ideology or set of practices?**

Since the story is about a racial microaggression it’s pretty predictable that people will point out how Stephen’s forgetting to include Mia is an example of white supremacy in action. They’ll also recognize that Jenn’s interruption represented a challenge both to white supremacy and patriarchy. Stephen’s initial apology when reacting to Jenn’s pointing out his passing over Mia will be interpreted as a typically white blindness to the effect of one’s actions. At this point people may cite the notion of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018).

John’s intervention to excuse and save Stephen is also cited as an example of white supremacy at play. By excusing Stephen’s overlooking of Mia, John is trying to advance the idea that race had little significance in the situation, and that this was a one-off event and not any form of systemic exclusion. John’s announcing that he now doesn’t feel safe in the course and that he’s going to withdraw from subsequent conversations is also an exemplar of whiteness. As we point out in chapter 2 whites, unlike people of color, are able to choose when they wish to engage with race. Again, white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018) will probably be mentioned.

**How is the specific location of the story affected by wider structures, systems and forces?**

The story takes place in a specific classroom and it is easy to assume that this constitutes more or less a self-contained universe. But in the small groups participants often start to dig deeper.

*The college* – the first point of analysis is usually the college. People ask about the college’s mission statement, its funding and the health of student enrolments. They will ask about the degree to which the class itself exemplifies or contradicts the mission statement. The two of us usually mention the influence of market forces. Both of us teach in private institutions so the logic of capitalism is clearly at play. Our institutions are tuition driven and it’s clear that an overwhelming concern of leadership is to attract the maximum number of students.

We ask people to ponder what influence, if any, that concern might have on the conduct of the class. Has Stephen created a problem by making a white male student decide he doesn’t wish to participate any more in the course? Could this lead to him dropping out and the subsequent loss of tuition revenue? What will be the financial consequences of Stephen’s naming and teaching about microaggressions? If communities of color become aware of this work would it cause more students of color to apply to the university? Or, would this work be opposed by alumni as too radical and not in keeping with the university’s traditions and identity?

It’s likely that we’ll then ask participants to consider how traditions are shaped and institutional identities defined. This will bring into play the levers and influences behind the scenes such as the Board of Trustees. People tend to think that power in colleges resides in the senior leadership team comprised of the President, Provost, and Dean’s Council. In fact, the body ultimately responsible for setting policy, defining goals and assessing compliance with the mission is the Board of Trustees.

Knowing this we get people to go to the college’s web site and look up the composition of the board. What kind of occupations or interests are represented in the board’s membership? Typically, board members are recruited who can ensure the financial stability of the college by attracting possible donors. Hence, many of them hold prominent positions as CEO’s or CFO’s in major corporations, banks and investment firms. We suggest that participants employ online search engines to find out about the racial mix of the board and ask what it means for the direction of the university to be set and monitored by a group composed of mostly white, business representatives.

*The program or department* – sometimes we suggest to participants that the analysis could be taken to an ever more local level, that of the particular department or program offering the course. To what degree are the individuals who make up this unit committed to uncovering and challenging racism? Given that the first stage in employee performance appraisals is situated at the department and program level, what implications will this kind of teaching have for those instructors up for reappointment, third year review, tenure or promotion? We then ask about the criteria used to assess people. Are teachers assessed for the extent to which they make students feel productively uncomfortable? Are assessments connected to student evaluations of teaching? If the latter, who designs the forms and what specific items do they contain?

Student evaluation of teaching forms often measure things such as a teacher’s clarity of explanations, the frequency and depth of feedback provided, and an instructor’s openness to questions. It’s rare to find a form that probes the degree to which students were discomforted, troubled or deeply challenged. We ask people to consider what the criteria for instructor assessment and the items on evaluation forms tell us about the wider forces at work. This brings us again to the ‘students as customers’ orientation of so many non-profit institutions that ironically find themselves operating with a for-profit capitalist logic of needing to attract paying customers. We may also get into the problematic nature of assigning numerical scores to teachers’ performance. Given what we know about the complexity of teaching and learning, especially when it involves questions of racial identity, people wonder how the merits of pedagogic work can be accurately represented by assigning a score on a Likert scale of 1 – 5.

**Whose interests inside and outside the specific location of the story are served or most harmed by the events described?**

Here we’re asking participants to shift their frame of analysis from someone who is listening to a description of local events to someone who is considering asymmetries of power. In terms of the specific events of the story people often say that it’s obvious that Mia’s interests are served because she got the opportunity to contribute, and that John’s interests are harmed because he felt Stephen had silenced him.

When this analysis is expressed we usually ask participants to go back and read the story again. We explain that we want them to think about the framing of this story within a system of white supremacy and we emphasize that, like all dominant ideologies, white supremacy is designed to be self-sustaining. In other words, it’s set up to keep white power and white normativity in place and viewed as the natural state of things. White supremacy protects itself by appearing to be unremarkable, a form of common sense. For us this suggests a reading of the story that’s directly opposite to the one just described.

Sometimes the reminder of the construct of white supremacy means that people now talk about Mia and John in different ways. Mia is now seen as someone who has a history of being silenced by omission. People quote the fact that she tells the class that being overlooked is her typical experience at the university and now present the story as one that illustrates the continuing power of white supremacy.

John’s situation is now seen as more complicated. Although people still argue that he has been harmed by Stephen’s intervention and they acknowledge his feeling that he is now in an unsafe environment, his decision to remove himself from the discussion is now sometimes positioned as an act of white privilege. John is privileged because he can simply turn away from the reality of race and choose not to think about what it means in a racist world. He has been granted the option of denying reality without much harm accruing to him. This, of course, is the direct opposite to the experience of people of color who are robbed of the choice of ignoring the realities of racism and white supremacy.

**Doing a Power Analysis**

The next stage is to ask people to conduct a power analysis of the story. We want them to be aware of how power dynamics are embedded in specific events. Although the story focuses on one class in one institution at one particular moment, the interactions described are shaped by wider asymmetries of power.

To help students do this we give a brief typology of three different kinds of power. We discuss what these terms mean and give examples of them in action.

* *Repressive power* - power used to constrain options, limit freedom or maintain the status quo. This could be as simple as a supervisor telling someone not to make trouble by bringing up a contentious issue, or as explosive as paramilitary forces beating up or killing protesters on the street.
* *Emancipatory* power - power experienced as motivating or galvanizing and that fuels activism and the desire for change. This could be a supervisor asking an employee ‘how can I help you do your best work?’ to *Black Lives Matter* mobilizing quickly for a day of protest immediately after a police killing.
* *Disciplinary power* – power that someone in the story exerts on themselves to make sure they stay in line. This is derived from Foucault’s (1980) work in which the impulse to engage in self-censorship and self-monitoring is posited as the chief way that social control is exercised. A common example is when you argue for more institutional diversity and inclusion so as not to be regarded as too radical or threatening, when really you would prefer to be asking about how to create an anti-racist identity.

We then ask the participants to do two things.

1. Go through each kind of power and see when you think each is being exercised in the story. Do this initially on your own.
2. Try to identify what wider systems, structures and ideologies support the exercise of each kind of power. Again, this should be done initially by yourself.

After participants have answered these questions privately they work in small groups of five to identify and compile the various responses. We then reconvene the whole group and ask each team to present what they’ve found.

**Repressive Power**

Stephen is usually identified as the chief enactor of repressive power. This is because people see his overlooking of Mia as an example of how systems embody white normativity and patriarchy. As the instructor Stephen has the weight of institutional authority behind his actions. That means it takes an act of courage to stand up to him and point out his disregarding of a woman of color. He is also often identified as enacting patriarchy, the idea that because men are assumed to think more logically, rationally and objectively they should be in charge of making decisions for the collective. Until he was called on his assumption that everyone had participated in the discussion, he believed he was acting in a democratic and inclusive manner.

John is also sometimes cited as exercising repressive power because he has removed himself from any further discussion of racial issues. On the face of it, this seems like a withdrawing or giving up of power because he will not be rationalizing Stephen’s conduct or explaining it away as a benevolent, momentary error. However, in removing himself from the conversation he is denying other students the chance to learn how he experiences and enacts white supremacy. After all, the experts on how white supremacy and patriarchy are learned and internalized are white people. By not contributing to future discussions John is blocking the other students’ opportunity to understand better how dominant ideologies operate to determine whites’ behavior.

**Emancipatory Power**

Because she spoke up to address Stephen’s overlooking of Mia, Jenn is typically cited as the chief enactor of emancipatory power. Her intervention caused Stephen to ask Mia to express her opinion on the matter at hand. It also prompted Stephen to reflect on the incident during the break and to come back and initiate a conversation on micro-aggressions.

Sometimes people get into a deep conversation about the problematic notion of a white person ‘liberating’ a person of color, and the colonial legacy that embodies. Was it condescending of Jenn to intervene, thereby robbing Mia of the chance to speak up for herself? Did it perpetuate the ‘savior’ mentality, where whites take on the responsibility to liberate people of color from oppression? Or, was Jenn using her white privilege in a responsible way to bring the exercise of white supremacy to the attention of a powerful white male? After all, she could make the challenge to Stephen’s authority without the risk of being accused of playing the race card, whereas Stephen could have dismissed Mia as seeing a racial motive where none existed.

**Disciplinary Power**

Disciplinary power is power exercised by someone on himself or herself, to ensure they keep their conduct within acceptable tramlines and norms. In this instance Mia is usually identified as the enactor of disciplinary power. She has learned to stay quiet when she is overlooked or ignored either because she has learned that’s how the world works or because she has suffered the consequences of speaking up for herself. Maybe her peers have told her that challenging a white professor for sins of omission will bring a punishment down on her. Possibly her elders have instilled in her a cultural reverence of authority and told her it is disrespectful to criticize a teacher. Maybe her complaints in the past have been dismissed or not believed. Perhaps she is just exhausted from having to confront all the micro-aggressions and institutional racism she has experienced.

As people talk about Mia’s choice to remain silent the very notion of choice becomes examined. When you know you will be dismissed or punished for an action, what kind of free choice really exists? Participants ponder whether staying silent was a conscious decision on Mia’s part informed by her past experience of criticizing authority, or whether it was a deeply internalized response that she little awareness of. Perhaps this represented the way she had been taught to move through her life.

The discussion then branches into different directions. If people focus on the way that elements of Asian American culture and the Confucian tradition instill a notion of good conduct as listening respectfully to elders and automatically attributing wisdom to their actions and decisions, then we talk about the way that cultural upbringing frames so many interactions in communities and organizations. If we focus on Mia learning that to survive she needs to stay silent when she is overlooked, then we are back to acknowledging the influence of patriarchy and white supremacy. If the discussion goes in this latter direction then we talk about the racial and gender composition of influential bodies such as congress, the presidency, the military, multinational banking, the judiciary and corporate America. Female participants tend to bring numerous examples of being systematically marginalized or ignored in the male dominated institutions or organizations where they have worked.

**Ideology Critique**

This exercise is drawn from critical theory’s emphasis on learning to critique systems and practices for the ways in which they enshrine dominant ideology. There is a desire to identify structural silences and omissions, ways of thinking about the oppressive actions of systems that are ignored or excluded.

In ideology critique we take a common organizational, movement or community practice that has been designed to be helpful and empowering and examine it for the ways different people in the organization, movement or community experience it contrarily. The intent is to invert our normal thinking about the apparently obvious benefit and common sense logic of institutional ways of functioning and to see them instead as structured to preserve hierarchies of power. Ideology critique is intended to help participants to understand the blind spots in their own decision-making, and to help organizations understand better how their structures and systems regularly exclude certain voices and perspectives.

Facilitators begin by presenting a typical action or event that is intended to promote effectiveness or realize the organizational mission statement. Participants are then asked to do the following on their own.

* Describe the practice and attribute meaning and significance to it in terms of the accepted, dominant view. What is it intended to achieve? What’s the reasoning used to justify its utility?
* Examine that view for internal inconsistencies, paradoxes and contradictions.
* Identify what is being omitted from the dominant view. What are its structured silences and absences. What views, perspectives and experiences are unrepresented in your framing of the practice or action? Why do you think these have been missed?
* Decide who benefits from the dominant practice and who is most disadvantaged by it.
* How could the practice/action be re-invented to be fairer, more inclusive or more justified by your mission?

After answering these questions privately, people are then put into small groups to share their responses. The exercise ends with the whole workshop, meeting, training or class convening to hear from each group.

**An Ideology Critique Example: Diversifying the Curriculum**

A case we often use is a practice we have seen on many campuses. Faced with the realization that demographic changes mean that students entering higher education will come from more and more diverse racial groups, many colleges have attempted to broaden the core curriculum to include more authors of color and to introduce modules dealing with race. They want to demonstrate that they are non-racist and supportive to students of color. Along with this initiative goes an effort to recruit more faculty of color. The institution then announces their new diversity initiative to the world as evidence of their responsiveness to communities of color and their commitment to inclusion.

*Describe the practice and attribute meaning and significance to it in terms of the accepted, dominant view. What is it intended to achieve? What’s the reasoning used to justify its utility?*

The dominant view is that including more authors of color will make white students more racially aware and will result in students of color feeling that their lives and experiences are represented and valued on campus. This will lead to lower attrition rates for students of color and help white students develop an appreciation for the contributions of scholars of color. As a result the campus climate will become friendlier and welcoming for students of color and white students will be helped to develop an anti-racist identity.

*Examine that view for internal inconsistencies, paradoxes and contradictions*.

One possible inconsistency concerns the way that authors of color and modules are positioned. If students see them as add-ons, rather than comprising a permanently altered center, then this initiative will be seen as a temporary band-aid covering a far deeper structural and cultural problem. Also, if the curriculum is presented with a smorgasbord approach so students can pick and choose which authors to read and which modules to study, we could quickly end up with students of color volunteering to study authors of color and race-based topics, while white students stick with the Eurocentric canon. This will potentially re-segregate the curriculum.

There is also the possible contradiction that while the curriculum is emphasizing difference and divergence, the teaching methods and assessment rubrics remain unaltered. So, whilst this curricular reform is meant to celebrate different ways of experiencing the world, it is taught in ways that privilege text over oral communication and words over images. Traditions of oral storytelling and collectivity prized by some cultures may well not be reflected in how students’ learning is evaluated. Sharing ideas might be interpreted as plagiarism and there will be no opportunity to present group, rather than individually completed, assignments.

Finally we have to ask who will teach these new courses? Asking instructors who have little knowledge or training in this area can backfire horribly, leaving students of color feeling exposed and unprotected. Without experience in leading contentious discussions, teachers could end up doing more harm than good and legitimizing the racist views of some white students.

*Identify what is being omitted from the dominant view. What are its structured silences and absences? What views, perspectives and experiences are unrepresented in the practice or action? Why do you think these have been missed?*

Much will depend on who chooses the nature of these curricular changes. If white committee members choose the authors of color and design the modules dealing with race, then the authentic experiences of people of color are missing. This white view of which authors of color are acceptable and how units dealing with race shall be framed can lead to the exclusion of radical scholarship that challenges the foundations of the academy and calls out white supremacy.

The reason why radical scholarship and contentious modules are not included is to protect the interests of the white members of the institution. They wish to demonstrate their multicultural commitment without being called to personal account.

*Decide who benefits from the dominant practice and who is most disadvantaged by it*.

If ‘softer’ authors of color are chosen, if race-based modules are designed to celebrate individual diversity rather than delve into structural racism, and if students can choose from a smorgasbord of options (thus allowing white students to omit reading radical authors of color or studying racism) those who benefit from this practice are whites. Members of the board of trustees and the senior leadership team can issue news announcements that highlight the curricular changes as evidence of their racial responsiveness. Faculty who teach in these kinds of courses can escape examining their own personal learned racism or naming the racist policies of the institution. If enrolments increase and attrition decreases then the board of trustees can claim to be managing the institution’s financials prudently.

Most disadvantaged are the students of color that this institutional effort is officially designed to serve. They will have been served a false bill of goods and will experience a counterfeit anti-racist effort; one that looks as though it’s tackling the problem seriously but in fact is designed to keep things exactly the same.

If, however, the authors of color chosen directly address systemic racism, and if the new race-based modules focus on how white supremacy is learned, disseminated and positioned as a common sense and obvious way of interpreting the world, then the interests of people of color are served. Also, if the word gets out and about in communities of color that the university is serious about tackling racism then the institution will benefit by attracting increased numbers of applicants of color and producing testimonials from alumni that speak to its genuine anti-racist identity.

Most disadvantaged will be members of the institution who think that race isn’t a problem, or who hold white supremacist views and wish to keep students of color off campus.

*How could the practice/action be re-invented to be fairer, more inclusive or more justified by your mission?*

Here participants will usually propose a number of options. One is to make sure that there is a high representation of students and faculty of color on committees charged with designing and implementing any curricular changes. This will ensure that diversifying the curriculum is not a showcase meant to deflect criticism without instituting any serious institutional reappraisal. Another might be to invite members of communities of color that the institution serves to suggest topics that would be at the center of the new race-based modules. These individuals could also serve on an oversight committee charged with making sure the institution sticks to its commitment to combat racism. Ensuring a built in mechanism to monitor how the initiative is going, and to share those results with the community, usually features as an important accountability mechanism.

**Thinking Structurally in Community**

Thinking structurally is a complex and difficult process that does not happen overnight. It qualifies as an authentic example of transformative learning as defined by Mezirow (1991) and, as such, is primarily a social learning process. The cognitive moves involved in thinking structurally entail shedding as much as possible the individualist ideology that is so embedded in American culture. It requires stepping back from the minutiae of one’s life and seeing them not just as personally determined, but as reflecting wider social trends and the interplay of economic and political forces.

This is what the mid-twentieth century theorist C. Wright Mills (1959) called the sociological imagination, the effort to understand that private troubles such as getting divorced or being fired are always connected to public issues such as the destruction of local economies and the growth of monopoly capitalism. If you work for a small business in a rural town, the giant Walmart moving in destroys the business, causes you to get laid off, leads to money troubles and a loss of self-worth and can result in divorce, drug use and maybe self-harm. Wright Mills argued that a Friday afternoon conversation in a Main Street store telling you that you were being let go and all the subsequent personal troubles that result is thus directly linked to the growth of global monopoly capitalism.

But making this paradigmatic leap to viewing the world structurally takes time. It happens incrementally and involves multiple movements forward that are then quickly followed by regressions to earlier ways of thinking. Crucial to this journey is a community of peers who are also trying to think structurally about the way that systems and ideologies shape what feel like individual decisions.

In empirical studies of how adults learn to view the world in a fundamentally altered way it appears that a community of inquirers is crucial (Cranton and Taylor, 2009). This community is what Boyd (2014) calls a container, a resting place in which people can test out new understandings and experiment with new identities with others on a similar quest. This suggests strongly that thinking structurally must be located in a learning community comprised of others struggling to comprehend the world this way. As with all forms of critical thinking (Brookfield, 2012) learning to think structurally happens best when it’s experienced as a social learning process. People discover assumptions and new perspectives most meaningfully when a peer brings it to their attention.

This finding is hardly surprising if we consider how difficult it is to learn about our assumptions and worldviews simply by deciding we will do some deep self-examination. Becoming aware of the mental frames that determine how we understand our experiences is a puzzling and contradictory task. Very few of us can get very far doing this on our own. No matter how much we may think we have an accurate sense of ourselves, we are stymied by the fact that we're using our own interpretive filters to become aware of our own interpretive filters! This is the equivalent of a dog trying to catch its tail, or of trying to see the back of your head while looking in the bathroom mirror. To become aware of structural and systemic factors we need to find friends, colleagues and peers that reflect back to us a stark and differently highlighted picture of who we are and what we do. This is why in chapter 6 we proposed a number of discussion protocols designed to guide people into deeper collaborative analyses of race.

**Conclusion**

Thinking structurally is a crucial cognitive move in developing an anti-racist white identity. Moving away from an individualist ideology means that we come to understand our own learned racism not as an inherent moral flaw but as a very predictable result of growing up subject to quietly effective white supremacist conditioning. Viewing our own racist acts and inclinations as structurally determined helps move people past an extended fixation on their guilt and shame. It’s easy to spend all your time fixated on your past sins and embarrassing naiveté and to be mortified by the casual racism you’ve enacted. This is a dead end. Thinking structurally lifts you out of that extended fixation on your flaws and moves you more quickly to activism.

This is because a structural perspective emphasizes the humanly created nature of white supremacy. Anything that has been created by humans can be dismantled and replaced by them. Of course doing this will be a long and difficult process that will require collective effort. Many anti-racist trainings focus on changing individual behavior and becoming less influenced by implicit biases and racial stereotypes. We think those things are important starting points, but we know that real, substantive change will only come when structures, systems and policies are fundamentally altered or replaced. And that will only happen if people work in political parties and social movements. So for us thinking structurally is the mental kick-starter to collective action.