Running Head: RACISM ROOT KIT

The Racism Root Kit:

Understanding the Insidiousness of White Privilege

Paul Pendler, Psy.D.

Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, Feinberg School of Medicine,

Northwestern University Medical School

Phillip Beverly, Ph.D.

Department of History, Philosophy, and Political Science

Chicago State University

ppendler@mac.com

Abstract

Despite efforts to increase racial awareness, Whites continue to display limitations in their ability to acknowledge their racist transgressions when confronted. Seemingly open-minded Whites continue to display what many authors have defined as "racial microaggressions" yet display an unwillingness to explore the antecedents to their behavior once challenged. What are the mechanisms that Whites utilize that prevent them from being open to considering underlying motivations of their behaviors? Failure to acknowledge the invisible Whiteness of being, the myth of meritocracy, and the associated privileges that come from White superiority play a significant role in preventing the establishment of empathic connections with people of color. Using the metaphor of a computer root program, which remains hidden from the operating system, designed to conceal itself from the overall operating system, a set of racist behaviors, representing a "racist root kit" are highlighted that can serve as an explanation for the difficulties Whites have when confronted with their behavior.

The Racism Root Kit:

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There have been numerous attempts to explain why U.S. society resists change despite the acknowledgement that significant racial disparities continue to exist in the United States. A current concept to address more contemporary interpersonal bias among Whites, "aversive racism" (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami & Hodson, 2002; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005) highlights one type of racist behavior among Whites, actions of well-meaning Whites who nevertheless maintain a significant racial bias. While identifying a very subtle form of contemporary racism, few authors have specifically addressed the reasons underlying the perceived resistance among White people when directly confronted with their own racist attitudes. What contributes to this resistance appears to be related to a lack of understanding about the tension that exists between the American doctrine of equality and fairness juxtaposed with the daily and systematic prejudice and discrimination that continues in society (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). The following paper presents an explanation of the psychological and intellectual processes that prevent full awareness of this inherent tension among White Americans' outward perceived beliefs about equality and their internal, unspoken racist beliefs. Using the analogy of a computer root kit program, we identify a set of tools automatically employed by White people when confronted by their racism that maintains White supremacist beliefs that work to hinder further dialogue and closeness with racial/ethnic minorities.

Much of our thinking has been influenced by the concept of "aversive racism," a term first used by Kovel (1970) to illustrate the range of racist beliefs from "traditional bigotry" to a much more subtle belief system among White people. As we have expanded our understanding

of what constitutes racist behaviors, new terms have evolved such as *modern racism, symbolic racism*, and *aversive racism* (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Buccerri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). The common thread that runs through this lexicon speaks to the more "disguised nature" of racist behaviors and beliefs as opposed to what previously has been understood as overt bigotry. While this new terminology has advanced our understanding of racism, we contend that a deeper analysis is necessary to understand how seemingly well-intentioned White people continue to act, often unconsciously, in racist ways. For example, we wonder about the aversive racists who "endorse fair and just treatment for all groups but unconsciously harbor feelings of uneasiness towards Blacks and thus try to avoid interracial interactions" (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, p. 619). Can a deeper underlying premise operate to keep White people from feeling comfortable in diverse settings and continue to display subtle and insidious negative feelings? If, as Hardy & Laszloffy (1998) suggest, increasing one's racial sensitivity ultimately requires White people to examine how they live their lives on a daily basis, what are the variables that prevent full conscious awareness of how they operate in contemporary American society, all the while asking, "How do I manifest a pro-racist ideology?" (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1998, p. 122).

A significant advancement in this thinking occurred through the work of Sue et al. (2007) in delineating behaviors they call "racial microaggressions:"

> Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group (p. 274).

These actions often occur outside an individual's conscious awareness and when challenged, can often be met with a response akin to "that certainly was not what I meant by that comment."

Sue and his colleagues delineated three forms of microaggressions: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. Microassaults are explicit racial slurs with the intention to hurt an intended victim through name-calling. Microinsults are subtle communications that convey rudeness and attempt to demean one's racial identity. Finally, microinvalidations are comments that intend to exclude or nullify the feelings or experiences of persons of color. The authors attribute the particularly insidious nature of microaggressions to the fact that the racist reality of the experience is often invisible to both the perpetrator and recipient (Sue et al., 2007, p. 275). The perpetrator often is able to explain away the act with a plausible and nonbiased explanation, and the recipient may have the feeling that "something is not right" but due to the subtle and indirect nature of the microaggression, not be able to prove it. In fact, many people of color may find it easier to handle overt and obvious racist acts rather than microaggressions, which can be vague and disguised (Herbert, 2007, p.5). Thus the psychological reverberations of these actions impact both the White perpetrator and the minority recipient.

What can be learned from this important development in the study of cultural racism? First, the impact of microaggressions falls primarily on people of color, who are burdened with having to continually decide whether or not to intervene and educate White people about racial sensitivity. Second, racial awareness, a necessary component of cultural sensitivity becomes challenged when White people are confronted about the intention behind their behavior, comment, etc. The various defensive responses of White people to this "moment of truth" encouraged the authors to examine more closely the mechanisms that may prevent a White person from acknowledging the impact of a microaggression.

It is our belief that the underlying the difficulty many White people have when confronted with the impact of their racist behavior centers around unconsciously held cultural values of White privilege and, ultimately, White supremacy. A term that is often associated with such extremists as the Ku Klux Klan and skinheads, "White supremacy" is much more inconspicuous and serves to hide racism, allowing "White people to oppress and harm persons of color while maintaining their individual and collective advantage and *innocence*" (Sue, 2006, p. 15, *emphasis added*). This privilege, quite hidden from conscious awareness, is an essential element of all White peoples' conditioning as they grow up in contemporary American society. In short, Whites in the United States cannot help but be indoctrinated into the privilege of Whiteness, the myth of meritocracy (Sue et al., 2007) and, ultimately, supremacy. This has been written about by McIntosh (1988), who described "White privilege" as the invisible knapsack of *unearned* benefits that has been granted to all White people based on looks alone.

What prevents White Americans from openly acknowledging the receipt of the unearned benefits of being White is that they have been taught the principles of democracy, which emphasizes the right of all people to be treated equally, and most consciously believe they live according to these principles of equality. They have been unwilling to explore the fact that they have *unconsciously* engaged in serious forms of denial about the more dubious and subtle forms of experiences that contradict these democratic ideals—denial of privilege, denial of supremacy, denial of the unearned nature of this benefit, and, most importantly, the denial of the necessity to examine supremacy. Sue has described this unwillingness of White Americans to explore their unconscious biases, racial prejudices and racial oppression as a "conspiracy of silence" that maintains the essential benefits bestowed on someone by virtue of being White (Sue, 2006, p. 22). He maintains that only by "making Whiteness visible" will Americans be able to unpack

the unconscious association of Whiteness with normality and superiority and be closer to actualizing a society of legitimate equality (p. 28).

A significant step in "making Whiteness visible" to well meaning White people who nonetheless harbor longstanding fears and biases, act these biases out unconsciously or consciously, and display various types of microaggressions, is finding a way to make such *invisible* knowledge visible. This is where we began to ask questions: What are the mechanisms that prevent White people from remaining open when confronted or invited to examine their racist behavior? How does White superiority function to confuse White people and keep them unaware of the impact of their behavior when dealing with people of color? To what degree does White superiority keep White people from being in relationship with people of color? How can White people learn how to remain in relationship with people of color even as they engage in their own fearless search to make their invisible racist belief system visible? This "fearless" search requires White people to hold themselves accountable for their participation in a pro-racist ideology. It involves taking a critical look at what White people have been socialized to believe is "normal" and, more importantly, identifying a set of behaviors that exist solely to prevent the conscious awareness of microaggressions. In order to heal and establish real, sustained relationships with people of color, White people need to be willing to "find a way to make visible, to make abnormal and ugly, the normal" (Watts-Jones, 2004, p. 507).

In effect, the doorway into politically alive relationships with people of color involves a willingness to continually step on "landmines," exploring and spotlighting racist behaviors or thoughts, all the while resisting the temptation to fall into denial or become ignorant of such behaviors or thoughts. An unwillingness to do so prevents accountability and ultimately restricts the deepening of relationships between White people and people of color. We propose that White

people possess a "root kit program" that works to prevent the recognition of racist behaviors and thoughts. Using the analogy of computer programming, this "root kit program," which by design is hidden from sight, will be used to explain the mechanisms that prevent White people from recognizing and admitting their unconscious racist beliefs.

The Root Kit Program

Most computer operating systems within a computer can be accessed by what has been called a "root kit" that operates in the root kernel of the operating system without the operating system being aware of its presence. Thus it exerts a powerful source of control within the hardware structure. A root kit is a set of software tools intended to conceal running processes, files, and system data from the overall operating system. Concealment is essential with the goal to maintain command or control over a situation while being unacknowledged. Famous incidents of computer virus attacks on various information technology systems occur as a result of secret instructions being installed into the root kernel and then "released" into the computer's operating system. At a simple level, instructions within the root program maintain a significant level of control over a computer's overall operating system. An essential component of root programs is that it must remain "hidden" from easy detection. Thus, the metaphor of an underlying and concealed "program" that maintains control over a system became an obvious analogy to a "rooted" set of behaviors and thoughts that exist solely to prevent White people from a conscious awareness when they are confronted with their pro-racist behavior. While an appropriate analogue, the authors acknowledge it has its limitations when applied to the complexity of the human psyche.

If we examine what happens when a White person launches a microaggression and is confronted by a person of color, frequently the White person will express disbelief, confusion, denial or qualification. Rarely is the White person able to acknowledge the bias present in a microaggressive comment or behavior. A typical response might be, "*Oh, now you know me, you know I'm not a racist.... Of course you know I didn't mean that.*" Whereas an idealistic response might be, *"Oh, let me think…. Yes, you are right. My comment was a knee-jerk response and I can see how I was dismissive of you and made a racist comment."* Unfortunately, the latter response is less common. Paradoxically, it is only through the complete and open acknowledgment of biased comments or behaviors that relationships between people of diverse backgrounds can be strengthened. This requires that White people be much more willing to consider the underlying mechanisms at play that prevent the full acknowledgment of their supremacy and, ultimately, their racism. Using a "root program" analogy, then, could it be possible that this "program" operates unconsciously in White people and immediately activates when they are confronted about their racist behavior?

The Racism Root Kit

We return once again to the question: What prevents White people from acknowledging their microaggressions? Our answer is that a "root kit" or set of behaviors buried deep in the "root program" of the White person's psyche becomes activated to prevent the full awareness of racist thoughts and behaviors. They are specific behaviors whose primary purpose is to mask racist behaviors, beliefs, thoughts, etc., thereby preventing the individual from owning or acknowledging racist behavior. Based on the responses of White participants in a series of Race awareness workshops and a review of the literature, we have identified thirteen tools in the racism root kit that may be used by White people to prevent the conscious awareness of their

racism. The tools can be put into two categories—offensive and defensive. One tool can be used either offensively or defensively. Each of these responses can emerge when the White person is challenged or invited to look at how race might be a factor in a given social interaction.

Racism Root Kit Behaviors		
Denial	Masochism	White Guilt (Offensive)
Hurt Feelings (deflection)	Apology/Faux Apology	Pain game (Offensive)
Narcolepsy	Faux Compassion	Attack (Offensive)
Shame	Defense	Intellectualization (Both)
I Don't Understand		

Defensive Root Kit Behaviors

Denial

This tool and response is the easiest to spot. When Whites are confronted with statements, behaviors, or beliefs that are at their core racist, one of the first tools in the root kit that becomes activated is denial. Responses such as *"I have black friends"* or *"I don't see color"* are evidence of the denial tool. An inability to be open to the possibility that the experience of the other could be valid is a consistent element of White supremacy. Denial becomes the opposite of what Hardy and Laszloffy describe when they speak about "racial sensivity" namely, "using oneself to actively challenge attitudes, behaviors, and conditions that create or reinforce racial injustices" (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1998, p. 119). Activating the "denial tool" is also consistent with micro-assaults. The repudiation of the experience ("microinvalidation") of the person of color is a typical by-product when White people do not acknowledge their racist

behavior.

Hurt Feelings (Deflection)

Deflecting so that the focus is off the racist behavior is the second tool within the root kit. This happens when a White person immediately responds to a confrontation about a microaggression by acting hurt. By expressing hurt feelings, White people assume that a deeper relationship exists that should "excuse" the comment or behavior, thus negating where the behavior stemmed from. It serves to place the White person at the center of an interaction, the place assigned as a result of White supremacy. This tool is particularly insidious because it places an emotional burden on the receiver of the racially based oppression or trauma. When a White person responds, *"I'm hurt that you think I could say or believe something like that,"* people of color experience it as both a microinvalidation and a deflection. Another consequence of the deflection is that it moves the White person away from a moment of greater connection that might be possible if he or she had been willing to reflect on the comment within the context of the relationship.

Narcolepsy

A more sophisticated tool, narcolepsy, occurs when seemingly committed White people reach a threshold in their racial sensitivity and literally appear to go "blank." This can occur from a White person's sheer exhaustion when trying to wrestle with his or her racism and its impact on their relationships. Recognizing the weight of oppression and the depth of racial trauma may also instigate the narcoleptic response. This tool can appear in racial workshops or anytime when White people attempt to develop greater racial sensitivity. A White person's use of narcolepsy around racial awareness reflects privilege, however, as obviously people of color do not have the luxury of "falling asleep."

Shame

Displaying shame in response to a confrontation about racist behavior can look similar to hurt feelings. When this tool is active, the White person begins a debilitating shame spiral that prevents him or her from fully experiencing the potential truth of the racist statement, behavior, or belief. Once the White person descends into a shame spiral, the emotional attention is fixed on that person, placing whiteness and its wounds at the center rather than the underlying premise (i.e., supremacy or privilege) that created the statement or behavior. The deceptive element of the shame spiral is that it allows the person to place the responsibility for the statement, behavior or belief on something outside of him or herself. It elevates responsibility to the cultural level and absolves the transgressor without ever addressing the damage of the original interaction that was challenged.

Masochism

In order to satisfy some internal need for punishment of historical oppressions, some White people engage in masochistic behaviors. One example of this tool is not locking one's car doors while driving through neighborhoods with high crime rates and significant minority populations. This behavior is unconsciously masochistic. Most people of color who live in the same neighborhoods would not dare engage in such irresponsible behavior. Another example of the masochism tool is when a White person allows Black people to unload their anger for what Whites have done to Blacks in the historical past. In this instance, the White person becomes a receptacle for potential and actual abuse. This acceptance of punishment is a deflective mechanism that prevents a White person from examining his or her individual behavior.

Apology

Another tool in the root kit that is seemingly innocent and possibly altruistic is the apology. Well meaning White people when confronted with the impact of their personal racism might offer an apology for past mistreatment. Statements such as *"I'm sorry for what you/your people went through with slavery"* both distances the experience in time, removing it from the current lived reality, and at the level of relationship. Slavery was an institution that existed more than a century ago and the challenge that triggered the apology tool likely happened at a personal or interpersonal level in the present moment. This tool is effective at disarming a person of color because apologies often defuse any anger that may have been generated by the original encounter. Part of Western culture that prevents active engagement is the belief that apologies have substance and should be accepted if offered. Similar to shame, the apology tool places a burden on the aggrieved to withdraw their challenge or withhold further comment.

A variant of the apology tool is the faux apology, one that is extended in hopes of deflecting attention without the intention of repairing damage to a relationship. The faux apology differs from the apology in its authenticity and intention.

Faux Compassion

A root kit tool sometimes used in conjunction with the apology tool is the faux compassion tool. When challenged personally the White person may respond with a statement like *"I feel your pain."* This also is deflective. While displaying empathy toward another is often associated with an act of connection, the speed with which White people rush to express sympathy and understanding at the expense of acknowledging their participation in racist behavior and ideology discourages a deep relational connection in the moment. Again the paradox of experiencing more discomfort through one's own examination of participation in pro-

racist ideology, supremacy, or privilege ultimately is the bridge that brings people into closer relationship.

Defensiveness

One of the most obvious root kit tools occurs when a White person responds to a Black person by saying that they never owned slaves and therefore should not have to bear any responsibility for the modern incarnations of racism or racialized behavior. This defensive posture is usually intended to end the conversation and relieve the White person of the responsibility of privileged behavior. The use of the defensiveness tool, in addition to trying to silence the person of color, also protects the ideological presence of White supremacy by reinforcing the belief system in White Americans that slavery was the only experience that they are or should be responsible for concerning racism.

"I don't understand"

Similar to the average adolescent response of "I don't know," *"I don't understand,"* begs the issuance of a pass around whatever perceived transgression has occurred. Within the judicial system, ignorance of the law is no excuse for misconduct. In the area of race work, a similar sentiment is necessary. The use of the "I don't understand" tool can also be seen in the results of a study conducted by Trepagnier (2006) who used the term "silent racism" to describe the seemingly harmless thoughts, images, and assumptions that shape White peoples' realities about differences. Trepagnier found that the passivity among some of her subjects in her study took on three forms: (1) detachment from race matters, (2) apprehension about being perceived racist, and (3) confusion about what is racist and what is not (p. 6). People of color do not have the luxury of being ignorant of complex racial dynamics in a system founded on and dominated by White supremacist ideology. When White people use this tool, it is designed to shift

responsibility away from the individual onto the person of color who then has several choices, all undesirable. First, a person of color may attempt to teach the White person in order to bring a level of understanding to the situation. Second, a person of color may change the conversation altogether to something less threatening and more universally understood like the weather. Third, the person of color may exercise an exit strategy and disengage from the White person altogether. In these encounters, White people tend to experience greater tension the more this root kit tool gets activated. Once again, a critical element of this behavior invites the person of color to assume the responsibility for bringing cultural and racial awareness to the surface. While for many this has been the norm for years, the challenge to advance racial awareness and dialogue is for White people to obtain their own understanding without relying on a person of color to raise this awareness.

<div align="center">Offensive Root Kit Behaviors</div>

The root kit tools just described share a common defensive or deflective nature. Three additional tool kit behaviors can be considered offensive in that they actively separate and protect the White person from individual responsibility or accountability around race behavior.

Pain Game

One very familiar tool used by White people is to play the pain game. The pain game is designed to silence, diminish and denigrate the experience of the person of color (microinsult and microinvalidation). This tool seeks to make equivalent experiences by using statements like, *"Well, if you think you people have it bad, what about the Holocaust?"* The pain game shifts attention of the impact of the racist statements, behaviors or beliefs by focusing on alternative racial, ethnic or target group. The pain game has an implicit message of *"get over it because you are not the only ones."* Opportunities for greater relatedness through a deeper understanding of

White behavior are thus lost through this "contest of pain."

Attack (The Resume Approach)

When utilizing this tool, the White person tends to denigrate and degrade any person who has the audacity to challenge his or her statements, beliefs or behaviors. "Attacking" operates similarly as in professional sports where "the best defense if a good offense" since the attention shifts to the person of color who then becomes the subject of a second negative experience. The attack tool may use the resume approach. In this instance, the attacker delivers to the challenger a multi-cultural résumé, identifying how his or her behaviors exclude participation in racist behaviors, i.e., *"I have many Black friends"* or *"We hired a Latina nanny."* Again, the end result of this behavior keeps White people from having greater connectedness with people of color. It is important to note that utilizing "attack" is not the same as the obvious expression of verbal aggression or overt negative statements.

White Guilt

The final offensive tool of the racism root kit is White guilt. It is both an individual and collective response to oppression. When utilizing this tool, White people may appear to be overly solicitous in order to "make up" for the historical experience of oppression, find themselves "bending over backwards to help others," and generally find themselves being unable to set reasonable boundaries within interpersonal encounters with people of color or around issues concerning people of color. A common place this occurs socially is when a person of color expresses a strong negative emotion in a group setting about dealing with White people. A person experiencing White guilt will often approach this person to provide comfort as if to "make up for" the indignation expressed by the person of color and position themselves as "not like that." Supremacy themes can appear well hidden since "doing the right thing" for another

truly masks an underlying need to "make up" for something as opposed to a true understanding

of the real impact people of color experience when dealing with the various microaggressions of

daily life. In short, the action stemming from guilt typically reflects superiority and the need to

"help" to bring people of color to their level.

Combined Offensive-Defensive Root Kit Tools

Intellectualization

This tool provides the White person an opportunity to assert their intellectual superiority

by dismissing the emotional experience of the people of color with an intellectual interpretation

from the position of White privilege. Used as a defensive tool, a White person might comment

on the exceptions, such as the success of a media figure or professional athlete as an indicator of

the absence of racism, privilege and White supremacy. If the defensive intellectualization, which

is designed to deflect attention away from the racist thought, belief or action, fails the White

person can turn the intellectualization into an intellectual attack. That could take the form of

dismissing the experience of the person of color and telling the person to 'get over it' because

logically the person of color should not be having the experience they are having.

Root Kit in the Service of Supremacy

Computers have various hidden programs that wield significant influence over the total

operating system. Similarly, the racism root kit serves a valuable function for White people,

namely maintaining a worldview that allows them to experience reality through a Euro American

perspective (Sue, 2004). White people cannot help but be significantly influenced by this

underlying program, operating in a default manner to maintain the illusion of sameness and

equality. As Sue described, to fully deny the imbalance of power allows White people to

maintain their unearned privilege and advantage in society (p. 763). We ultimately believe that

the root kit prevents White people from recognizing the ethnocentric basis of their beliefs, values, and assumptions (p. 764). In short, the root kit program operates hidden in the root kernel of consciousness to maintain the illusion of White supremacy and working to prevent White people from seeing the full reality. It perpetuates what Sue has depicted as the "invisible veil of Whiteness."

One result of the racism root kit is the development of a masked White self as a function of avoiding an association with racism (Thompson & Neville, 1999). The masked White self maintains one face to the world while hiding from the full awareness a deeper belief about White identity. In circumstances where one's behavior, thoughts, or actions become questioned, the racism root kit activates a set of tools to prevent the deeper White self from being seen or acknowledged. The root program as it relates to race actively prevents the conscious awareness of what Thompson & Neville define as White identity, which:

> is associated, in part, with the notion of White superiority and non- White inferiority. Piercing the cycle of racism will likely entail Whites having to acknowledge that they are socialized to believe that they are endowed with racial   privilege and entitlement and the willingness to relent the advantages or privileges gained from racial oppression. This effort, although simply stated, is probably one of the most formidable barriers to the demise of racism because Whites' socialization is deeply embedded within the American ethos. (p. 197)

It is ironic that only through "piercing" the root kit program, particularly during interpersonal encounters where Whites' behaviors are challenged, can there be true connection, accountability, and a potential for healing. The tools of the racism root kit, however, work actively to prevent this.

Underneath the Racism Root Kit: A Potential for Relationship

In order to continue to increase racial awareness, White people have to "do battle" with the tools of their racism root kit. This ultimately means establishing an alternative "patch" to

prevent the root kit tools from activating in such a way that prevents relationship with others. It is our belief that the racism root kit forever remains present. Attempting to eradicate it would prove futile just by the very notion that White people have for centuries developed their own idealized history and as a consequence, forged a false belief in superiority (Thompson & Neville, 1999). What becomes required however is a fearless and at times painful commitment for what Thompson & Neville define as a "more realistic assessment of the White self—which is interdependent with an assessment of racial others" (p. 199). Essentially the "patch" to the root kit establishes a White identity that is *interdependent* with others who do not look White or are not White. While a more realistic assessment of the White self ultimately leads to greater stability, this requires continual vigilance so that the racism root kit tools do not rise to the surface in order to prevent this "new" self-appraisal.

One consequence of this commitment for White people is to experience both significant cognitive dissonance and the emotional pain of racial oppression. It is the onset of pain that activates the tools of the racism root kit and enlisting oneself in greater racial sensitivity essentially requires a struggle. There are clear risks to going against the root kit programs as it relates to White superiority. White people risk rejection, anger, isolation, and a strong sense of *betrayal* by other Whites. It requires the ability to tolerate a surge of powerful feelings both internally and from others. Being willing to challenge the automatic activation of the racism root kit requires White people "invest and more likely, continually reinvest in an aspect of the self that typically generates feelings of shame, guilt, rage, and anxiety" (Thompson & Neville, 1999, p. 200). Establishing a patch on the racism root kit to dampen the powerful automatic nature of root behaviors requires enlisting oneself in a "conspiracy of pain." This means a White person must invest in experiencing his or her own pain in the presence of people of color and other

White people. It is only then that long-term benefits can be produced—even while encountering potentially painful short-term effects.

Although the root kit is never uninstalled or eradicated, it may be dampened through the willingness to experience the pain associated with breaking down a false sense of White superiority and being willing to adopt a significantly different worldview. Again with accountability, i.e., by working against the automatic activation of racism root kit tools, and making the ugly, normal, can we begin to heal and move forward, separate and together, in a struggle for an appreciation of our separateness and our common connection as human beings.

Perhaps what occurs when moving through this "conspiracy of pain" will bring us closer to diminishing the insidious nature of the racism root kit. One of the greatest challenges and questions that remain to be answered is, "why would Whites willingly want to experience pain?" The field of psychology for example has been challenged to accept the necessity to teach, express, and develop a scientific knowledge base informed by social justice (Mays, 2000). What could motivate Whites in general to be willing to experience this discomfort in order to establish relationships with people of color? There are examples in the world—universal themes, in fact— that are lived in a variety of cultures that may shine light on the path that is necessary. One such example is the African concept of *ubuntu*, defined as "a person is a person through other persons" (Shutte, as cited in Louw, 1997). The South African government officially recognized Ubuntu in 1997 as:

> The principle of caring for each other's well being…and a spirit of mutual support …Each individual's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through a recognition of the individual's humanity. Ubuntu means that people are people through other people. It acknowledges both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and society wellbeing.

Establishing and sustaining relationships with people of color and adopting a stance towards White people to enlist them in this struggle are not easy challenges. Recognizing the longstanding mechanisms designed to prevent the adoption of the philosophy that "*I exist through my interactions with others*" will greatly advance the work White people can do to enhance racial sensitivity. Perhaps the Zulu concept of *Ubuntu* could be the beginning of a "patch" to the racism root kit. Such a proposition remains to be seen, but both White people and people of color can be served by adhering to such a universal principle of caring.

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