

# WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE

## Activity Cards

Based on the work of  
Kenneth Jones & Tema Okun  
dRworks • [www.dismantlingracism.org](http://www.dismantlingracism.org)

Developed by Kathy Obear, Ed.D

### PRINTING DIRECTIONS

These cards are designed to be printed on 11x17 heavy paper or cardstock.

Print the file "Actual Size" and do not use any of the shrink or fit options.

Print two-sided, flipping the paper on the short edge.

Cut the cards along the score lines provided on the front side of each sheet.

Each card set should contain 17, 2-sided cards, each measuring 5.66" x 11".

Discard the printing directions in each set.

## Reflection Questions TO SHIFT WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE

1. What is the specific policy, practice, program or service you are analyzing or revising?
2. What might have been the intentions (productive, unproductive) of those who created this policy, practice, program, or service?
3. What might be useful about this White Supremacy Culture characteristic?  
In this case, what are some of the probable negative impacts of this White Supremacy Culture characteristic?
4. By group membership, who might benefit from the current policy, practice, program or service?
5. By group membership, who might experience obstacles, hurdles or negative impact given the current version of this policy, practice, program or service?
6. How could you revise this policy, practice, program or service to equitably meet the needs of all people across racialized and colonized group identities? (flip each card over for some ideas)



1. How do I see this characteristic of White Supremacy Culture operating in the overall organization? My unit and/or team? In my practices?
2. When might this characteristic of White Supremacy Culture be useful at times?
3. When might this characteristic of White Supremacy Culture undermine organizational outcomes, such as team effectiveness, decision-making, innovation, working relationships, productivity, equity and inclusion, and customer service?

## Initial PROCESSING QUESTIONS

## Ways to Use These WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE CARDS

I believe we all are indebted to the work of Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun for their insightful, challenging resource, **White Supremacy Culture**. I am grateful for permission to use their material to create these **White Supremacy Culture Cards**.

I envision these Cards can be used in a variety of ways to deepen the capacity to recognize and interrupt *White Supremacy Culture* in organizational practices and interpersonal dynamics:

- Review and use the *Initial Processing Questions* to discuss the content of the Cards to learn more about the dynamics of White Supremacy Culture and the “Antidotes” to shift to greater inclusive, racially just organizational practices.
- Use the *Reflections Questions* to analyze a current or possible policy, practice, program or service to identify what, if any, aspects of *White Supremacy Culture* may be embedded in and/or perpetuated by it.
- Identify a variety of organizational climate and cultural dynamics. Analyze each one using the Cards to recognize how the characteristics of *White Supremacy Culture* might be embedded in each one. Review the corresponding *Antidotes* (on the back of each Card) to explore new ways of engaging and operating in a more inclusive, racially just culture.
- Use the Cards to analyze any specific attitude or behavior to identify how, if at all, different aspects of *White Supremacy Culture* may be fueling it.

For questions or if you have additional ways these Cards may be useful, I'd love to hear from you!

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# DEFENSIVENESS

The organizational structure is set up and much energy spent trying to prevent abuse and protect power as it exists rather than to facilitate the best out of each person or to clarify who has power and how they are expected to use it

Because of either/or thinking, criticism of those with power is viewed as threatening and inappropriate (or rude)

People respond to new or challenging ideas with defensiveness, making it very difficult to raise these ideas. A lot of energy in the organization is spent trying to make sure that people's feelings aren't getting hurt or working around defensive people

White people spend energy defending against charges of racism instead of examining how racism might actually be happening

The defensiveness of people in power creates an oppressive culture



# QUANTITY OVER QUALITY

All resources of organization are directed toward producing measurable goals

Things that can be measured are more highly valued than things that cannot, for example numbers of people attending a meeting, newsletter circulation, or money spent are valued more than quality of relationships, democratic decision-making, or ability to constructively deal with conflict

Little or no value attached to process; if it can't be measured, it has no value

Discomfort with emotion and feelings

No understanding that when there is a conflict between content (the agenda of the meeting) and process (people's need to be heard or engaged), process will prevail (for example, you may get through the agenda, but if you haven't paid attention to people's need to be heard, the decisions made at the meeting are undermined and/or disregarded)



# WORSHIP OF THE WRITTEN WORD

If it's not in a memo, it doesn't exist

The organization does not take into account or value other ways in which information gets shared

Those with strong documentation and writing skills are more highly valued, even in organizations where ability to relate to others is key to the mission





# Antidotes To WORSHIP OF THE WRITTEN WORD

Take time to analyze how people inside and outside the organization get and share information

Figure out which things need to be written down and come up with alternative ways to document what is happening

Work to recognize the contributions and skills that every person brings to the organization (for example, the ability to build relationships with those who are important to the organization's mission)

Make sure anything written can be clearly understood (without academic language, buzz words, etc.)



# Antidotes To QUANTITY OVER QUALITY

Include process or quality goals in your planning

Make sure your organization has a values statement which expresses the ways in which you want to do your work

Make sure this is a living document and that people are using it in their day-to-day work

Look for ways to measure process goals (for example, if you have a goal of inclusivity, think about ways you can measure whether or not you have achieved that goal)

Learn to recognize those times when you need to get off the agenda in order to address people's underlying concerns



# Antidotes To DEFENSIVENESS

Understand that structure cannot in and of itself facilitate or prevent abuse

Understand the link between defensiveness and fear (of losing power, losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege)

Work on your own defensiveness

Name defensiveness as a problem when it is one

Give people credit for being able to handle more than you think

Discuss the ways in which defensiveness or resistance to new ideas gets in the way of the mission





# ONLY ONE RIGHT WAY

The belief there is one right way to do things and once people are introduced to the right way, they will see the light and adopt it

When they do not adapt or change, then something is wrong with them (the other, those not changing), not with us (those who 'know' the right way)

Similar to the missionary who does not see value in the culture of other communities, sees only value in their beliefs about what is good



# PATERNALISM

Decision-making is clear to those with power and unclear to those without it

Those with power think they are capable of making decisions for and in the interests of those without power

Those with power often don't think it is important or necessary to understand the viewpoint or experience of those for whom they are making decisions

Those without power understand they do not have it and understand who does

Those without power do not really know how decisions get made and who makes what decisions, and yet they are completely familiar with the impact of those decisions on them



# EITHER/OR THINKING

Things are either/or, good/bad, right/wrong, with us/against us

Closely linked to perfectionism in making it difficult to learn from mistakes or accommodate conflict

No sense that things can be both/and Results in trying to simplify complex things, for example believing that poverty is simply a result of lack of education

Creates conflict and increases sense of urgency, as people feel they have to make decisions to do either this or that, with no time or encouragement to consider alternatives, particularly those which may require more time or resources





# Antidotes To EITHER/OR THINKING

Notice when people use 'either/or' language and push to come up with more than two alternatives

Notice when people are simplifying complex issues, particularly when the stakes seem high or an urgent decision needs to be made

Slow it down and encourage people to do a deeper analysis

When people are faced with an urgent decision, take a break and give people some breathing room to think creatively

Avoid making decisions under extreme pressure

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# Antidotes To PATERNALISM

Make sure that everyone knows and understands who makes what decisions in the organization

Make sure everyone knows and understands their level of responsibility and authority in the organization

Include people who are affected by decisions in the decision-making process

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# Antidotes To ONLY ONE RIGHT WAY

Accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal

Once the group has made a decision about which way will be taken, honor that decision and see what you and the organization will learn from taking that way, even and especially if it is not the way you would have chosen

Work on developing the ability to notice when people do things differently and how those different ways might improve your approach

Look for the tendency for a group or a person to keep pushing the same point over and over out of a belief that there is only one right way and then name it

When working with communities from a different culture than yours or your organization's, be clear that you have some learning to do about the communities' ways of doing

Never assume that you or your organization know what's best for the community in isolation from meaningful relationships with that community

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# POWER HOARDING

Little, if any, value around sharing power  
Power seen as limited, only so much to go around

Those with power feel threatened when anyone suggests changes in how things should be done in the organization, feel suggestions for change are a reflection on their leadership

Those with power don't see themselves as hoarding power or as feeling threatened

Those with power assume they have the best interests of the organization at heart and assume those wanting change are ill-informed (stupid), emotional, inexperienced



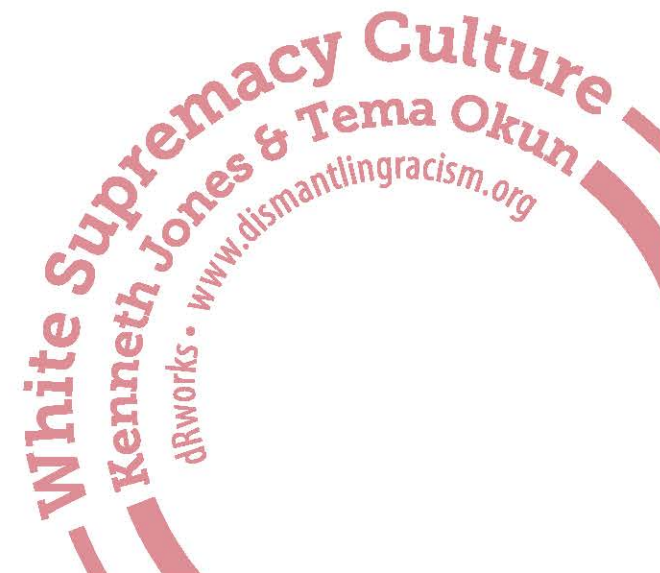
# FEAR OF OPEN CONFLICT

People in power are scared of conflict and try to ignore it or run from it

When someone raises an issue that causes discomfort, the response is to blame the person for raising the issue rather than to look at the issue which is actually causing the problem

Emphasis on being polite

Equating the raising of difficult issues with being impolite, rude, or out of line



# INDIVIDUALISM

Little experience or comfort working as part of a team

People in organization believe they are responsible for solving problems alone

Accountability, if any, goes up and down, not sideways to peers or to those the organization is set up to serve

Desire for individual recognition and credit

Leads to isolation

Competition more highly valued than cooperation and where cooperation is valued, little time or resources devoted to developing skills in how to cooperate

Creates a lack of accountability, as the organization values those who can get things done on their own without needing supervision or guidance





# Antidotes To INDIVIDUALISM

Include teamwork as an important value  
in your values statement

Make sure the organization is working towards  
shared goals and people understand how working  
together will improve performance

Evaluate people's ability to work in a team as  
well as their ability to get the job done

Make sure that credit is given to all those who  
participate in an effort, not just the leaders  
or most public person

Make people accountable as a group rather  
than as individuals

Create a culture where people bring problems  
to the group

Use staff meetings as a place to solve problems,  
not just a place to report activities



# Antidotes To FEAR OF OPEN CONFLICT

Role play ways to handle conflict before  
conflict happens

Distinguish between being polite and raising  
hard issues

Don't require those who raise hard issues to raise  
them in 'acceptable' ways, especially if you are  
using the ways in which issues are raised as an  
excuse not to address those issues

Once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity  
to revisit it and see how it might have been  
handled differently



# Antidotes To POWER HOARDING

Include power sharing in your organization's  
values statement

Discuss what good leadership looks like and make  
sure people understand that a good leader  
develops the power and skills of others

Understand that change is inevitable and  
challenges to your leadership can be healthy  
and productive

Make sure the organization is focused  
on the mission





# I'M THE ONLY ONE

Connected to individualism, the belief that if something is going to get done right, 'I' have to do it

Little or no ability to delegate work to others



# PROGRESS IS BIGGER, MORE

Observed in how we define success (success is always bigger, more)

Progress is an organization which expands (adds staff, adds projects) or develops the ability to serve more people (regardless of how well they are serving them)

Gives no value, not even negative value, to its cost, for example, increased accountability to funders as the budget grows, ways in which those we serve may be exploited, excluded, or underserved as we focus on how many we are serving instead of quality of service or values created by the ways in which we serve



# OBJECTIVITY

The belief that there is such a thing as being objective or 'neutral'

The belief that emotions are inherently destructive, irrational, and should not play a role in decision-making or group process

invalidating people who show emotion requiring people to think in a linear (logical) fashion and ignoring or invalidating those who think in other ways

impatience with any thinking that does not appear 'logical' to those with power





# Antidotes To OBJECTIVITY

Realize that everybody has a world view and that everybody's world view affects the way they understand things

Realize this means you, too

Push yourself to sit with discomfort when people are expressing themselves in ways which are not familiar to you

Assume that everybody has a valid point and your job is to understand what that point is



# Antidotes To PROGRESS IS BIGGER, MORE

Create Seventh Generation thinking by asking how the actions of the group now will affect people seven generations from now

Make sure that any cost/benefit analysis includes all the costs, not just the financial ones, for example the cost in morale, the cost in credibility, the cost in the use of resources

Include process goals in your planning, for example make sure that your goals speak to how you want to do your work, not just what you want to do

Ask those you work with and for to evaluate your performance



# Antidotes To I'M THE ONLY ONE

Evaluate people based on their ability to delegate to others

Evaluate people based on their ability to work as part of a team to accomplish shared goals





# PERFECTIONISM

Little appreciation expressed among people for the work that others are doing; appreciation that is expressed usually directed to those who get most of the credit anyway

It is more common to point out either how the person or work is inadequate

Or even more common to talk to others about the inadequacies of a person or their work without ever talking directly to them

Mistakes are seen as personal, i.e., they reflect badly on the person making them as opposed to being seen for what they are, mistakes

Making a mistake is confused with being a mistake, doing wrong with being wrong

Little time, energy, or money put into reflection or identifying lessons learned that can improve practice, in other words, little or no learning from mistakes

Tendency to identify what's wrong; little ability to identify, name, and appreciate what's right

Often internally felt, in other words, the perfectionist fails to appreciate their own good work, more often pointing out their faults or 'failures' ~ focusing on inadequacies and mistakes rather than learning from them; the person works with a harsh and constant inner critic

# SENSE OF URGENCY

Continued sense of urgency that makes it difficult to take time to be inclusive, encourage democratic and/or thoughtful decision-making, to think long-term, to consider consequences

Frequently results in sacrificing potential allies for quick or highly visible results, for example sacrificing interests of communities of color in order to win victories for white people (seen as default or norm community)

Reinforced by funding proposals which promise too much work for too little money and by funders who expect too much for too little

# RIGHT TO COMFORT

The belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort (another aspect of valuing "logic" over emotion)

Scapegoating those who cause discomfort

Equating individual acts of unfairness against white people with systemic racism which daily targets people of color



# Antidotes To RIGHT TO COMFORT

Understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning

Welcome it as much as you can

Deepen your political analysis of racism and oppression so you have a strong understanding of how your personal experience and feelings fit into a larger picture

Don't take everything personally

# Antidotes To A SENSE OF URGENCY

Realistic workplans

Leadership which understands that things take longer than anyone expects

Discuss and plan for what it means to set goals of inclusivity and diversity, particularly in terms of time

Learn from past experience how long things take  
Write realistic funding proposals with realistic time frames

Be clear about how you will make good decisions in an atmosphere of urgency

Realize that rushing decisions takes more time in the long run because, inevitably, people who didn't get a chance to voice their thoughts and feelings will at best resent and at worst undermine the decision because they were left unheard

# Antidotes To PERFECTIONISM

Develop a culture of appreciation where the organization takes time to make sure that people's work and efforts are appreciated

Develop a learning organization where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning

Create an environment where people can recognize that mistakes sometimes lead to positive results

Separate the person from the mistake

When offering feedback, always speak to the things that went well before offering criticism

Ask people to offer specific suggestions for how to do things differently when offering criticism  
Realize that being your own worst critic does not actually improve the work, often contributes to low morale among the group, and does not help you or the group to realize the benefit of learning from mistakes