

Using Tema Okun's "white supremacy culture" as a dismantling tool



Scott Endo, Kristy Rolog, Cynthia Sarver
Calvary Lutheran Church
Race Equity Committee

Calvary Lutheran Church

- Approximately 250 members
- Urban Congregation on Chicago Ave. S. Minneapolis
- Predominantly white
- Multigenerational
- LGBTQ+ Welcoming (RIC)

Why? Why now?

Police killings of black men

Race & Equity Task Force

- Book Studies and Movie Discussions
- Black Lives Matter banner on church bell tower
- Interim and Guest Preachers

Language: White Supremacy and White Fragility

Congregational Participation

Personal Storytelling and 1-on-1s on topic of Race

Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)

Intercultural Development Plan (IDP) Opportunities

Adult Education Hours on Race

Race & Equity Committee Formation

Bylaws

Budget

Representation

Retreats

Memberships:

- Isaiah MN
- Sacred Solidarity Network
- Emmaus Collective

White Supremacy Culture - Tema Okun

14 Characteristics

Antidotes

Organizational and Individual Culture

- Institutional Work (Power Mapping)
- Individual Reflection (IDP Work)

Personal/Organizational Connection

Educator in Public Schools

New Educators of Color Group Facilitation

Personal Learning and Examination

“white supremacy culture” by Tema Okun

[Dismantling Racism Works](#)

[White Supremacy Culture page](#)

[“White supremacy culture” article](#)

Introduction

“This is a list of characteristics of white supremacy culture that show up in our organizations. Culture is powerful precisely because it is so present and at the same time so very difficult to name or identify.”



Image source: <http://www.dismantlingracism.org/white-supremacy-culture.html>

Introduction, continued

“The characteristics listed below are damaging because they are used as norms and standards without being proactively named or chosen by the group. They are damaging because they promote white supremacy thinking. Because we all live in a white supremacy culture, these characteristics show up in the attitudes and behaviors of all of us – people of color and white people. Therefore, these attitudes and behaviors can show up in any group or organization, whether it is white-led or predominantly white or people of color-led or predominantly people of color.”

CHARACTERISTICS OF WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE

Adapted from "white supremacy culture" by Tema Okun, dWorks, www.dismantlingracism.org

<p>Perfectionism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little appreciation expressed for others' work Criticism more common Criticism of person or their work in their absence even more common Mistakes seen as personal failings ANTIDOTES: Develop a culture of appreciation; develop a learning organization, where it's expected that everyone makes mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning 	<p>Sense of Urgency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contrived sense of time that intensifies anxiety and/or democratic and thoughtful decision-making This working potential arises in favor of quick or highly visible results Revelation by funding proposals that promise (and funding that expects) too much for too little ANTIDOTES: Realistic workplans, recognizing that understandings 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; write realistic funding proposals 	<p>Defensiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization and energy focused on preventing abuse and protecting those in power Criticism of those with power viewed as inappropriate Difficult to raise new or challenging ideas Energy devoted to avoiding hurt feelings and working around defensive people ANTIDOTES: Understand how defensiveness is linked to fear (of losing power, face, comfort, privilege), name defensiveness as a problem when it is one 	<p>Quantity Over Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measurable things are most valued Little value attached to process Discomfort with emotion and feelings ANTIDOTES: Include process goals in planning; develop a written statement about how work will be done in the organization; develop methods for measuring process; recognize when you need to get out of the agenda to address people's feelings and underlying concerns 	<p>Worship of the Written Word</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those with strong documentation and writing skills are more highly valued, even in orgs where ability to relate to others is key The org doesn't value other ways in which information gets shared ANTIDOTES: Analyze other ways people get and share information; come up with alternative ways to document what is happening; work to recognize the contributions and skills that every person brings to the organization; make sure anything written can be clearly understood (is jargon-free) 	<p>Only One Right Way</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belief there is one right way to do things and that people will learn and adapt if When they do not, then something is wrong with them ANTIDOTES: Accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal, notice and name behavior when folks/guys push "one right way"; acknowledge you have a lot to learn from community partners way of doing; be willing to adapt; never assume you're the organization knows what's best for others
<p>Paternalism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision-making clear to those with power; unclear to those without it Those with power feel capable of making decisions for the interests of those without power Those with power don't view as important or necessary understanding the lived/experience of pain for whom they decide ANTIDOTES: Ensure transparency about decision-making; include people affected by decisions in the process 	<p>Either/Or Thinking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Things are either/or, good/bad, right/wrong, as judged by us No sense that things can be both/and Results in oversimplifying complex things Increases sense of urgency that we must do this or that without time to consider a middle way ANTIDOTES: When people use 'either/or' language, push for more than two alternatives; when people simplify complex issues, encourage deeper analysis; with urgent decisions, make sure people have time to think creatively 	<p>Power Hoarding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little value around sharing power Those with power feel threatened when change is suggested or evidence rises as a judgement of them They also assume they have everyone's best interests at heart, and that those wanting change are ill-informed, emotional, or inexperienced ANTIDOTES: Include power-holding in your org's values statement; discuss that good leaders develop the power and skills of others; understand that change is inevitable and that challenges to leadership can be productive and healthy 	<p>Fear of Open Conflict</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People in power try to ignore or run from conflict When someone raises an "issue," response is to blame that person rather than look at the issue Emphasis on being polite, so leading officials become being impolitely subtle or out-of-line ANTIDOTES: Role play ways to handle conflict before it happens; distinguish between politeness and leaving hard issues; once a conflict is resolved, reflect on how it was resolved and/or might have been handled differently 	<p>Individualism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little experience or comfort working in part of a team People feel responsible for solving problems alone Accountability goes up and down, not sideways to peers or those whom the organization serves Desire for individual recognition and credit Competition valued over collaboration ANTIDOTES: Include teamwork in your org values statement; make sure that credit is given to all those who participate in an effort, not just the leaders; practice group (not individual) accountability; use meetings to solve problems, not just report activities 	<p>I'm the Only One</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 ANTIDOTES: 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

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<p>Progress is Bigger, More</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observed in systems of accountability and success measurement Progress is an org that expands (adds staff, projects, etc.) or serves more people (regardless of quality of service) Gives no value, not even negative value, to the costs of this so-called progress ANTIDOTES: Ask how actions today will affect people seven generations from now; ensure that any cost/benefit analysis includes all costs, not just financial ones; ask those you work with and for to evaluate yearling performance 	<p>Objectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belief that objectivity is possible That emotions should not play a role in decision-making or group processes Requiring people to think in a linear fashion and ignoring those who think in other ways Impatience with any thinking that does not appear logical ANTIDOTES: Realize that everybody's perspective is shaped by their worldview; notice this means you, too; push yourself to sit with discomfort when people express themselves in ways unfamiliar to you; assume that everybody has a valid point and your job is to understand it 	<p>Right to Comfort</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort Scopelimiting those who cause discomfort Equating individual acts of unfairness against whole people with systemic racism that targets people of color ANTIDOTES: Understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning; don't take everything personally 	<h2>WE CAN DO BETTER!</h2> <p>ANTIDOTES QUICK-START GUIDE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a culture of appreciation: publicly express gratitude for people's work and contributions Choose integrity and actively refuse to participate in gossip Foster a culture of learning where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities Understand that defensiveness is linked to fear (of losing power, face, privilege, comfort) Identify other antidotes already in place within the organization and seek ways to highlight and build upon them
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Who can do this work?

**How has your organization
perpetuated these characteristics?**

**When have you found yourself
perpetuating one or more of these
characteristics?**

What are your next steps?