

Behaviors That May Unknowingly Reflect White Supremacy Culture

Groups often engage in and give preference to behaviors that can reflect and perpetuate white supremacy culture, and make it more difficult to include non-whites in leadership positions. These behaviors may include:

Perfectionism (holding back through fear of making mistakes; not taking the time to analyze mistakes in order to learn from them)

Too much Sense of Urgency (not taking the time to be inclusive, encourage thoughtful decision-making or consider long-term consequences; wanting to take the least possible time in making decisions)

Defensiveness and fear of Open Conflict (criticism of those in power is seen as threatening and inappropriate; makes it hard to raise or revisit ideas; lot of energy spent on making sure people's feelings aren't being hurt)

Quantity over Quality (activity all directed at producing measurable goals and outcomes, things that are measurable are valued over things that are not, the process of getting through an agenda efficiently takes precedent over people's need to be heard and to engage)

Worship of the Written Word (people with strong written skills are valued over others for that reason (consider: mistakes in resumes that doom the applicant))

Either/Or thinking (things are right or wrong, good or bad, we do this or that)

Power Hoarding (little value in sharing power; those with power feel threatened if suggestions for change in process are made; they don't see themselves as hoarding power, assume they have the best interests of the organization at heart and that those wanting change are ill-informed or inexperienced)

Individualism (discomfort working as a team, high value on those who get things done on their own, desire for individual recognition and credit, feeling the right to speak whenever one has something to say)

Progress is Bigger, More (progress is expansion in staff, projects, people served or involved regardless of how well served or involved)

Objectivity (invalidating the show of emotion, belief that there is such as thing as being objective)

Right to Comfort (equates individual acts with systemic racism (if I'm not a racist, I'm not supporting racism))

See *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups* by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, 2001. Summarized in handout provided in a workshop at the 2016 YWCA Race Summit.

No, I Won't Stop Saying White Supremacy Naming white supremacy shifts the locus of the problem to white people, where it belongs. May 21, 2017 by [Dr. Robin DiAngelo](#)

I am white. When I give talks on what it means to be white in a society deeply separate and unequal by race, I explain that white people who are born and raised in the U.S. grow up in a white supremacist culture. I include myself in this claim, as I enumerate all of the ways in which I was socialized to be complicit in racism. I am not talking about hate groups, of which I am obviously not a member. And no, I don't hate white people. I am addressing the majority of the audience to whom I am speaking, white progressives like me. If it surprises and unsettles my audience that I use this term to refer to us and not them, even after I have explained how I am using it, then they have not been listening. That recognition should trigger some sense of urgency that continuing education is needed. Yet invariably, a white person raises the objection: I really don't like that term! I associate it with the KKK and other white nationalist groups. Why can't you use a different term? As a classic example of white fragility, rather than stretching into a new framework, I am asked by a white participant to use language that is more comfortable and maintains their current worldview.

Many people, especially older white people, associate the term white supremacy with extreme and explicit hate groups. However, for sociologists, white supremacy is a highly descriptive term for the culture we live in; a culture which positions white people and all that is associated with them (whiteness) as ideal.

White supremacy captures the all-encompassing centrality and assumed superiority of people defined and perceived as white, and the practices based upon that assumption. White supremacy is not simply the idea that whites are superior to people of color (although it certainly is that), but a deeper premise that supports this idea—the definition of whites as the norm or standard for human, and people of color as an inherent deviation from that norm.

Thus, when race scholars use the term white supremacy, we do not use it the same way as mainstream culture does. Nor, do we use it to indicate majority-versus-minority relations. Power is not dependent on numbers but on position. We use the term to refer to a socio-political economic system of domination based on racial categories that benefit those defined and perceived as white. This system rests on the historical and current accumulation of structural power that privileges, centralizes, and elevates white people as a group. If, for example, we look at the racial break-down of the people who control our institutions, we see that in 2016-2017:

- Congress: 90% white
- Governors: 96% white
- Top military advisors: 100% white
- President and Vice President: 100% white
- Current POTUS cabinet: 91% white
- People who decide which TV shows we see: 93% white
- People who decide which books we read: 90% white,
- People who decide which news is covered: 85% white,

People who decide which music is produced: 95% white
Teachers: 83% white
Full time College Professors: 84% white
Owners of men's pro-football teams: 97% white

These numbers are not a matter of “good people” versus “bad people.” They are a matter of power, control, and dominance by a racial group with a particular self-image, worldview, and set of interests being in the position to disseminate that image and worldview and protect those interests across the entire society.

For a clear example of what it means to have institutional control and use it to the advantage of your group, we can look to Women's suffrage in the U.S. Only white men could grant women suffrage because white men controlled the government (and all of the other institutions that allowed them to disseminate and enforce patriarchy across society). They still do. While women could be prejudiced against men and discriminate against individual men in isolated cases, women as a group could not deny all men their civil rights. Yet men as a group could deny all women their civil rights. Once white men finally granted women the right to vote, only white men could then deny access to that right for women (and men) of color. White people also write the history that tells us that “women” were granted the right to vote, and erases the reality that that access was not granted equally across race. The term white supremacy allows us to capture the all-encompassing and multi-dimensional nature of white control.

Naming *white supremacy* changes the conversation because it shifts the locus of the problem to white people, where it belongs.

While the dominant racial/ethnic group in other cultures may not be white (for example, the Chinese rule Tibetans, and the Tibetans may experience racism from the Chinese), there is nonetheless a global dimension of white supremacy. Through mass media, corporate culture, advertising, United States-owned manufacturing, military presence, historical colonialist relations, missionary work, and other means, white supremacy is also circulated globally. One of the most potent ways this is disseminated is through media representations which have a profound impact on how we see the world. Given the role of media in modern life, films shape our ideas about romance, conflict, family, friendship, sexuality, criminality, belonging, and otherness.

Those who write and direct films are our cultural narrators; the stories they tell shape our world views. Given that the majority of white people live in racial isolation from people of color (and Black people in particular) and have very few authentic cross-racial relationships, white people are deeply influenced by the racial messages in films. Of the 100 top grossing films worldwide in 2016, 95 were directed by white Americans (99 of them by men). That is an incredibly homogenous group of directors. Because these men are most likely at the top of the social hierarchy (in terms of race, class and gender), they are the least likely to have a wide-variety of authentic egalitarian cross-racial relationships. Yet they are in the position to represent the racial “other.” Their representations of the “other” are thereby extremely narrow and problematic, and reinforced over and over.

Take, for example, the Jackie Robinson story. Robinson is often celebrated as “the first African American to break the color line and play in major-league baseball.” While Robinson was certainly an amazing ball player, this story line depicts Robinson as racially special; a black man who broke that color line himself. The subtext is that Robinson finally had what it took to play with whites, as if no black athlete before him was strong enough to compete at that level. Imagine if instead, the story went something like this: “Jackie Robinson, the first black man whites allowed to play major-league baseball.” This is a critical distinction because no matter how fantastic a player Robinson was, he simply could not play in the major leagues if whites—who control the institution—did not allow it. Were he to walk onto the field prior to being granted permission by white owners and policy makers, the police would have removed him.

Narratives of racial exceptionality obscure the reality of ongoing institutional white control while reinforcing the ideologies of individualism and meritocracy. They also do whites a disservice by obscuring the white allies behind the scenes who worked hard and long to open the field to African American players. These allies could serve as much needed role-models for other whites (although we also need to acknowledge that in the case of the desegregation of baseball, there was an economic incentive for these allies).

And precisely because our voices have been granted more legitimacy under *white supremacy*, we needed to use those voices to challenge the apartheid of the decade.

White supremacy as a powerful ideology that promotes the idea of whiteness as the ideal for humanity is especially relevant in countries that have a history of colonialism by Western nations. Charles Mills (1997) describes white supremacy as “...the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today” (p.1). He notes that while white supremacy has shaped Western political thought for hundreds of years, it is rarely named. In this way, white supremacy is rendered invisible while other political systems—socialism, capitalism, fascism—are identified and studied. In fact, much of its power is drawn from its invisibility—the taken-for-granted aspects of white superiority that underwrite all other political and social contracts. White resistance to the term white supremacy prevents us from examining this system. If we can’t identify it, we can’t interrupt it.

Naming white supremacy changes the conversation because it shifts the locus of the problem to white people, where it belongs. It also points us in the direction of the life-long work that is uniquely ours; challenging our complicity with and investment in racism. Yes, this work includes all white people, even white progressives. None of us have missed being shaped by the white supremacy embedded in our culture. Current research in implicit bias demonstrates that all people have racial bias, that most of it is unconscious, and that it does manifest in our actions. Because white people control the institutions, our racial bias is embedded and infused across society and works to the advantage of all white people, regardless of intentions, awareness, or self-image. Our task is not to exempt ourselves from the impact of these conditioning forces, but rather to continually seek to identify how these forces shape us and

manifest in our specific lives, and interrupt those manifestations.

The term white supremacy seems to be especially resisted by those whites who marched in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's. For those of you that did march, I understand that you may have strong negative associations with the term. So let me acknowledge that your involvement was critical. I, and many others, are grateful for your activism. The racism you marched against was coming from white people (as it always does). In that, it was our problem, as it always has been. We needed to get involved. And precisely because our voices have been granted more legitimacy under white supremacy, we needed to use those voices to challenge the apartheid of the time. I sincerely thank all of the white people who put themselves on the line to protest.

Having said that, we can now move on to the next point: marching in the 60's did not certify you as racism-free for the rest of your lives, with no re-certification necessary, ever. Nor did it free you of any need for further accountability to people of color. And might there have been some of the more subtle (to whites) forms of racism perpetrated even as you marched? I am not talking about fire-hoses on protesters or beatings at the lunch counter forms of racism. Of course you were, and are, against those explicit forms. I am talking about the white progressive forms of racism which support these more explicit forms; the white savior syndrome you likely brought with you (how could you not – you are a product of your culture), the condescension and patronizing, the marveling at how articulate the Black folks were, even as you took over their movement. I am talking about the reasons that have led folks to do things differently today; why we have Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ). BLM leads, and SURJ is expected to take its direction from BLM.

If we take a closer look at the stories we tell about Jackie Robinson, ourselves, and our activism, we see that these stories mask white supremacy by rendering invisible: whites, white advantage, and the racist policies and practices of the institutions we control. This is what we need to make visible, understand, and interrupt.

So, no, we won't stop using the term *white supremacy*.

It's not on those of us involved in the movement today to change our language for further white comfort. In fact, that is the height of white entitlement. Rather, it is on white people to break out of our comfort zones, realize that things have changed, and initiate our continuing education and skill-building. The internet is over-flowing with excellent guides on how to do this. The inability (or refusal to do so) functions as a form of resistance to change and protection of a very limited and problematic world view. This resistance is not benign; it functions to hold the current racial order in place. There is no neutral stance. We need to move on and move forward, because we are calling it what it is: white supremacy.

"Working at the Defender allowed me to see the truth about America, that "race" is a pernicious lie that permeates our laws and customs, revived in each generation by entrenched interests that threaten to undermine the entire national enterprise, just as it is challenged in each generation by a courageous few who believe that this nation can truly become a bastion of justice and equality."

Ethan Michaeli, [The Defender](#), 2016

Independents Covenant Group

August 16, 2017

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting:

We have made enormous progress in teaching everyone that racism is bad. Where we seem to have dropped the ball... is in teaching people what racism actually IS.

- Jon Stewart

White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.

- Peggy McIntosh

Check-in: How is it with your spirit?

Questions

1. What associations do you have with the term "white supremacy"?
2. What do you feel when you hear the term? Have your feelings changed over the last few months or years? If so, how and why?
3. Have you seen or experienced instances of white privilege or white supremacy in your daily life?

Closing Words:

The liberation struggle of our people was not about liberating blacks from bondage, but more so, it was about liberating white people from fear.

- Tokyo Sexwale

The moment we choose to love, we begin to move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to love, we begin to move toward freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others.

- bell hooks

Independents Covenant Group

May 17, 2017

Opening Reading/Chalice Lighting

One reason I am a Unitarian Universalist is because it is a faith where I can bring all of the best of what I was taught growing up in my multifaith family and because, as a religion grounded in principle and reflection, justice-making and righteous action are essential to our faith, not something ancillary. -- **Dr. Takiyah Nur Amin**

White people tend to be visitors to the struggle for racial justice, ones that aren't forced to be there but can choose to come in and leave whenever they like. People of color reside in the struggle for racial justice by virtue of their race. As people who are constantly in the struggle, people of color have the right to make claims on what they find okay and not okay, what they see as helpful and not helpful. -- **Aisha Ansano**

Check-in: How is it with your spirit?

Focus Readings (from the White Supremacy Teach-in on May 7)

First, a definition: White Supremacy is the belief that white people are superior to those of all other races, especially the black race, and should therefore dominate society.

Our culture was built upon this belief, and its institutions and policies are based upon this belief. It's our culture – the culture we live in, the water we swim in, the culture in which the UUA and this congregation exist. We're not aware that much of what we do and decide and put forth is based on the culture we live in – the white dominant culture. As we become aware, we might ask ourselves, as UU's and as members and friends of this UU church, what white supremacy elements might exist in our own spiritual home?

We do not need to be white supremacy actors – I am not a white supremacist and neither are you. But we exist in this culture -- this white supremacy culture. It's important to say this again -- that White supremacy does not require our intentional participation -- but dismantling it will. This is an uncomfortable adventure, but one we need to explore together.

From Between the World and Me: . . . Race is the child of racism, not the father. And the process of naming “the people” has never been a matter of genealogy and physiognomy so much as one of hierarchy. Difference in hue and hair is old. But the belief in the preeminence of hue and hair, the notion that these factors can correctly organize a society and that they signify deeper attributes, which are indelible—this is

the new idea at the heart of these new people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully, to believe that they are white.

But all our phrasing—race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body. – **Ta-Nehisi Coates**

HEALING

Don't speak to me of "healing" racism,
or "wounded souls" or the "painful hurt"
until you are willing to feel the scars
on my great-great-grandmother Laury's back.

Don't speak to me of "values"
or "justice" or "righting wrongs"
until you are able to feel the heartache
of my great-grandfather Graham
whose father may have been his master.

Don't speak to me of "equity"
or "opportunity" or the "common good"
until you are able to hear the fear
from my grandmother Mae
as the only black woman in her college.

Don't speak to me of "passion"
or "longing" or "standing on the side of love"
until you know the shame
felt by my mother Edwina
mocked by teachers for the curve of her back.

Don't speak to me of "together"
or "understanding" or "empathy"
until you know my rage
as a young actor hearing the direction
to "be more black . . . more male."

The pain you are trying to heal has no real name.
This "pain" you speak of has no story;
it is anonymous, vague, and empty.

Don't speak to me of "healing"
for I heal the second I am ripped apart.
My wounds self-suture,

and like the clever creature I am,
I just grow new legs to outrun the pain ever faster.
It is something I have had to practice for generations,
that feel like an eternity.

So, please don't speak to me of "healing"
because you cannot know what healing means
until you know the hurt.

-- Adam Lawrence Dyer

Questions

1. What does the term "white supremacy" mean to you?
2. Has your perception of the term or the effect it has had on our history and our society changed? In what way?
3. Have you personally seen instances of white supremacy in action?
4. What questions do you have about this issue or about the direction our church and the UUA is taking?

Closing Reading

I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And I see God working in a way that we, in some strange way, are responding. Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, the cry is always the same: "We want to be free."

– Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We are never complete. We are never finished. We are always yet to be. May we always help each other to grow toward all that we are capable of becoming.

– author unknown