

Identifying and Addressing Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture

Overview

This resource guide highlights characteristics of white supremacy culture, as outlined by Dr. Tema Okun, that can be pervasive in organizations and institutions. [White supremacy](#) is made manifest in many ways, some being more covert than others. The characteristics identified in this resource guide can be rendered invisible due to how they become norms and standards in a variety of settings, academia included.

From Dr. Okun: “Culture is powerful precisely because it is so present and at the same time so very difficult to name or identify. 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...these attitudes and behaviors can show up in any group or organization...Because white supremacy culture is the water we swim in, we inevitably internalize the messages about what this culture believes, values, and considers normal. We absorb these messages as individuals and as a collective. As a result, white supremacy culture shapes how we think and act, how we make decisions and behave.”

This guide will identify each characteristic and provides disruptions to address them when we see or experience them in the classroom or larger university context. Dismantling white supremacy culture requires us to be aware of its characteristics in our internal, interpersonal, and institutional lives. If we actively identify and disrupt white supremacy culture, we are promoting an anti-racist culture. To begin this work, we have to start with a self-examination of how white supremacy culture shows up in ourselves and our work.

If you feel shame, become defensive, or get angry while going through this list, lean into the discomfort, and interrogate where your feelings are coming from. Keep in mind the purpose of this list is not to shame or blame, but to identify and disrupt white supremacy culture. As Dr. Okun states: “The characteristics on the list are designed to make us forget that we have access to multiple ways of being and knowing, ways that white supremacy has suppressed and oppressed for the purpose of creating confusion about what is important while encouraging us to forget what we already know.”

Each section contains a characteristic, examples of it, ways to disrupt it, and reflection prompts for you to consider. Each characteristic is a hyperlink to Dr. Okun’s website, where you can see the complete list of examples and disruptions, as well as find additional readings and stories related to the identified characteristic.

Goals

- 1) To identify characteristics and examples of white supremacy culture.
- 2) To provide disruptions of each identified characteristic.

	<p>3) To aid instructors in becoming aware of how these characteristics show up in personal, interpersonal, and institutional contexts.</p>
<p>Anti-Racist Pedagogy Principles</p>	<p>The following anti-racist pedagogy principles are incorporated into this resource guide. For a review of the principles, visit our Practicing Anti-Racist Pedagogy homepage.</p> <p>Principle 1: Anti-racist pedagogy acknowledges racism in disciplinary, institutional, departmental contexts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying and disrupting white supremacy culture characteristics in these different contexts can create more inclusive and anti-racist spaces. <p>Principle 2: Anti-racist pedagogy centers both structural and personal manifestations of racism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> White supremacy culture characteristics are not distilled down to individual acts or choices but are part of a larger dominant culture that promotes them as the right ways of thinking and being. Each characteristic has corresponding reflection questions that ask us to consider how that particular characteristic shows up in our personal and institutional contexts. <p>Principle 3: Anti-racist pedagogy disrupts racism whenever/wherever it occurs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are either promoting white supremacy culture or we are disrupting white supremacy culture. When we critically examine how these characteristics impact our lived experiences, we better equip ourselves to disrupt them and seek alternative ways of thinking, learning, and knowing. <p>Principle 4: Anti-racist pedagogy seeks change within and beyond the classroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reflection questions in this guide ask you to think about how these characteristics impact your classrooms and engagement with students. They also ask you to reflect on how these characteristics show up in your interactions with colleagues, within your department, and within your institution. <p>Principle 6: Anti-racist pedagogy focuses on the importance of process over time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As stated in the Overview, it can be challenging to recognize or name these characteristics as they are ingrained in many organizations and cultures. This guide serves as a starting point to critically examining our relationship to these characteristics. This guide is an exercise to help develop reflexive muscles that allow us to continue this work over time.
<p>Implementation</p>	<p>This resource guide is intended to help instructors consider how white supremacy culture permeates in and outside of the classroom. After going through this guide, journaling about how these characteristics show up in internal, interpersonal, and institutional contexts is encouraged. For additional insight into these different contexts, review our “Definitions as a Starting Point” page. Reflection prompts are included for each characteristic and are a starting point for self-reflection. Self-reflection is key to practicing anti-racism as we need to understand our relation to white supremacy</p>

	<p>culture in order to dismantle it in our personal lives. This critical reflection helps build “muscle” to recognize discriminatory patterns or systems that have been rendered invisible, such as the characteristics in this resource guide.</p> <p>After journaling and reflecting, identifying and acknowledging when these characteristics show up is the next step of disrupting white supremacy culture. Like implicit bias, without acknowledging these characteristics when they appear, we will be unable to disrupt them at the moment.</p> <p>It is also recommended that instructors review the following guides for additional insight and context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying Dialogic Techniques (Resource Guide) • Examining Privilege and Oppression (Activity Guide) • Implicit Bias (Resource Guide) • Invisible Knapsacks (Activity Guide) • Racial Bias Test (Activity Guide) <p>It is our goal that our activity guides and resource guides are not used in isolation from one another. Engaging in inclusive and/or practicing anti-racist pedagogy is an ongoing process that requires consistent engagement and reflection. Be sure to review the many resources that are provided on the LSA Inclusive Teaching website.</p>
<p>Challenges</p>	<p>As mentioned in the overview, these characteristics have become norms and standards. Because many of us have become socialized through these characteristics, it may seem difficult or impossible to disrupt them. Furthermore, because they are normalized, it can be challenging to recognize them at first. However, white supremacy culture is not inexorable, and disrupting these characteristics starts with acknowledging their existence. We will be overwhelmed with the task if we skip our personal work on this issue. First, reflect and focus on how you can disrupt these characteristics in your own life. Resist the sense of urgency that may come in wanting to immediately figure out next steps as sitting with our feelings and reflecting on the actions we can take are critical first steps. Once we have an understanding of our relationship to these characteristics, we can continue by focusing on the interpersonal and institutional contexts in our lives.</p> <p>Because it is engrained in our lives, disrupting white supremacy culture can be uncomfortable and can bring about “hot moments” in and outside the classroom. Preparing for these moments and addressing them is an important part of the process. See our resource guide “Hot Moments” for further insights.</p>
<p>Integration with Course Content</p>	<p>When thinking about your course, use this list to identify where these characteristics may show up in your syllabus or course design. For example, “worship of the written word” is a characteristic found on this list. Do your assessments focus heavily on writing assignments or are there alternative methods for students to demonstrate their learning and knowledge? See our resource guide, “Creating Inclusive Assignments and Assessments,” for further insights.</p>

Additional Readings	<p>Truss, J. (2019, July 18). <i>What Happened When My School Started to Dismantle White Supremacy Culture</i>. Retrieved from EducationWeek: What Happened When My School Started to Dismantle White Supremacy Culture</p> <p>Daree Miller, S. (2021, January 18). <i>Confronting White Supremacy Culture in the Social-Impact Sector</i>. Retrieved from Idealist: Confronting White Supremacy Culture in the Social-Impact Sector</p> <p>JustLead Washington (2020, April 20). <i>White Supremacy Organizational Culture in the Time of COVID-19</i>. Retrieved from JustLead Washington: White Supremacy Organizational Culture in the Time of COVID-19</p>
Citations	<p>Adapted from 'White Supremacy Culture,' Dr. Tema Okun. Retrieved from: White Supremacy Culture - Coming Home to Who We Really Are</p>

Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture

Characteristic	Examples, Ways to Disrupt, and Reflection Prompts
<u>Perfectionism</u>	<p>Examples of Perfectionism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Little or no appreciation is expressed among people for the work that others are doing; when appreciation is expressed, it is often or 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.• Even more common is 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 is put into reflection or identifying lessons learned that can improve practice. In other words, there is little or no learning from mistakes, and/or little investigation of what is considered a mistake and why.• Linked to the characteristic of one right way, where the demand for perfection assumes that we know what perfection is while others are doing it wrong or falling short. <p>Ways to Disrupt Perfectionism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a culture of appreciation; take time to make sure that everyone’s work and efforts are appreciated.• Develop a learning community or organization, where the sated expectation is that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning.• Create a culture of support that recognized how mistakes sometimes lead to positive results.• Create a culture of inquiry about what constitutes the “right way” and what defines a “mistake”.• Build in an understanding that every approach yields unintended consequences and even the most strategically made decisions will have unanticipated consequences.• Separate the person from the mistake; when offering feedback, always speak to the things that went well before offering criticism; when a mistake is jointly or collectively acknowledged, ask for specific suggestions about what the person or group has learned and how we would do things differently moving forward.• 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; if you are constantly criticizing yourself in your relationships with others, you focus the attention on you, on support for you, rather than on the issue at hand.

	<p>Reflection Prompts to Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How does perfectionism show up in my work? ● How does perfectionism show up in my critique of student work? A colleague's work? ● When have I seen perfectionism show up in my department? ● What is one way I can disrupt perfectionism in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What additional supports do I need to do this work?
<p><u>One Right Way</u></p>	<p>Examples of Only One Right Way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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 to “fit” the one right way, then those defining or upholding the one right way assume something is wrong with the other (those not changing), not with us (those who ‘know’ the right way). ● Similar to a missionary who sees only the value in their beliefs about what is good rather than acknowledging value in the culture of the communities they are determined to “convert” to the right way of thinking and/or the right way of living. <p>Ways to Disrupt Only One Right Way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal; once a group has made a decision about what to do, honor that decision and see what you and the community or organization will learn from making that decision, even and especially if it is not the way you would have chosen. ● Work on developing the ability to notice when you become defensive and/or insistent about doing something your way and do everything you can to take a breath; allow yourself room to consider how a different path or paths might improve your approach and/or offer you something you really need. ● 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 things; assume that you or your organization can't possibly know what's best for a community in isolation from meaningful relationships with that community. <p>Reflection Prompts to Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How does only one right way thinking show up in my work? ● How have I seen only one right way thinking show up in my classroom? ● When have I seen only one right way show up in my department? ● What is one way I can disrupt only one right way thinking in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What additional supports do I need to do this work?

Paternalism

Examples of Paternalism:

- Decision-making is clear to those with power and unclear to those without it.
- Those holding power assume they are qualified to (and entitled to) define standards and the one right way as well as make decisions for and in the interests of those without power.
- Those holding power often don't think it is important or necessary to understand the viewpoint or experience of those for whom they are making decisions, often labeling those for whom they are making decisions as unqualified intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, or physically.
- Those without power understand they do not have it and understand who does.
- Those without power are marginalized from the decision-making processes and as a result have limited access to information about how decisions get made and who makes what decisions; at the same time they are completely familiar with the impact of those decisions on them.
- Those without power may internalize the standards and definitions of those in power and act to defend them, assimilate into them, and/or collude with those in power to perpetuate them in the belief that this will help them to belong to and/or gain power; they have to do this to survive.

Ways to Disrupt Paternalism:

- Make sure that everyone knows and understands the decision-making hierarchy in the community and/or organization (transparency).
- Make sure everyone knows and understands their level of responsibility and authority in the organization.
- Avoid making decisions in the absence of those most affected by those decisions or, said more proactively, always include those most affected in the brainstorming and decision-making.
- Support people at all levels of power to understand how power operates, their level of power, what holding power responsibly looks like, and how to collectively resist and heal from internalized tendencies to hoard and defend power.

Reflection Prompts to Consider:

- How does paternalism show up in my work?
- How have I seen paternalism show up in my classroom?
- When have I seen paternalism show up in my department?
- What is one way I can disrupt paternalism in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level?
 - What additional supports do I need to do this work?

Objectivity

Examples of 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.
- Assigning value to the "rational" while invalidating and/or shaming the "emotional" when often if not always the "rational" is emotion wrapped up in fancy logic and language.

- 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’ or ‘rational’ in ways that reinforce existing power structures. In other words, those in power can be illogical, angry, emotional without being disregarded while those without power must always present from a ‘rational’ position.
- Refusal to acknowledge the ways in which ‘logical’ thinking and/or decision-making is often a cover for personal emotions and/or agendas often based on fear of losing power, face, or comfort.
- Refusal to acknowledge the ways in which objectivity is used to protect power and the status quo.

Ways to Disrupt Objectivity:

- Realize that everybody has a worldview, and that worldview affects the way we understand the world.
- Realize this is true for you too; you are not “objective,” you are steeped in your own world view and if it is the dominant world view, realize how that world view includes the belief that it has the capacity to be objective.
- Support yourself and your group to sit with discomfort when people are expressing themselves in ways that are not familiar to you.
- Support yourself and your group to sit with discomfort when people are sharing points of view or lived experiences that are not familiar to you.
- Understand that emotional intelligence is real and valuable; work to become more emotionally intelligent.
- Assume that everybody has a good reason for what they are feeling. Your job is to understand that reason and how it connects to their position, particularly if you are the one with more formal or informal power.
- Engage in the simple act of using “I” statements, which leads us to claim our own experience rather than generalizing from our experience in ways that can exclude those who have a different perspective.

Reflection Prompts to Consider:

- How does “a belief in objectivity” show up in my work?
- How have I seen objectivity show up in my classroom?
- When have I seen objectivity show up in my department?
- What is one way I can disrupt objectivity in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level?
 - What additional supports do I need to do this work?

[Sense of Urgency](#)

Examples of Sense of Urgency:

- Makes it difficult to take time to be inclusive, encourage democratic and/or thoughtful decision-making, think and act long-term, and/or consider the consequences of whatever action we take.
- Frequently results in sacrificing potential allies for quick or highly visible results. For example, sacrificing the interests of BIPOC people and communities in order to win victories for white people (seen as default or norm community).

- Reinforces existing power hierarchies that use the sense of urgency to control decision-making in the name of expediency.
- Reinforced by funding proposals that promise too much work for too little money and by funders who expect too much for too little.
- Reinforces the idea that we are ruled by time, deadlines, and the need to do things in a “timely” way often based on arbitrary schedules that have little to do with the actual realities of how long things take, particularly when those “things” are relationships with others.
- Connected to objectivity in the sense that we think that our sense of time and/or meeting deadlines are objective because we see or frame time as objective.
- Involves unrealistic expectations about how much can get done in any period of time; linked to perfectionism in the urgency that perfectionism creates as we try to make sure something is done perfectly according to our standards.

Ways to Disrupt Sense of Urgency:

- Realistic work plans based on the lived experience of the people and organization involved.
- Leadership that understands that things take longer than anyone expects.
- A commitment to equity, including a commitment to discuss and plan for what it means to embed equity practices into the work plan.
- A commitment to learn from past experience how long things take.
- Collaborative development of realistic funding proposals with realistic time frames.
- Clarity ahead of time about how you will make good decisions in an atmosphere of urgency (including clarity about what constitutes a “good” decision).
- An understanding 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 a decision where they were left unheard.

Reflection Prompts to Consider:

- How does a sense of urgency show up in my work?
- How have I seen a sense of urgency show up in my classroom?
- When have I seen a sense of urgency show up in my department?
- What is one way I can disrupt a sense of urgency in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level?
 - What additional supports do I need to do this work?

Defensiveness

Examples of Defensiveness:

- The organizational structure is set up and much energy is spent trying to prevent abuse and protect power rather than to facilitate the capacities of each person or to clarify who has power and how they are expected to use it.
- Because of either/or binary thinking, those in power view and/or experience criticism as threatening and inappropriate (or rude).
- People respond to new or challenging ideas with objections or criticism, making it very difficult to raise these ideas.
- People in the organization, particularly those with power, spend a lot of energy trying to make sure that their feelings aren’t getting hurt, forcing others to work

around their defensiveness rather than addressing them head-on. At its worst, they have convinced others to do this work for them.

- White people spend energy defending against charges of racism instead of examining how racism might actually be happening.
- White people claim that participation in anti-racist activity means they cannot be racist or be engaged in racism.
- An oppressive culture where people are afraid to speak their truth.

Ways to Disrupt Defensiveness:

- Understand the link between defensiveness and fear (of losing power, losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege).
- Work on your own defensiveness; ask yourself what you are defending against and why.
- Set up brainstorming and other sessions designed to consider ideas ahead of time by naming defensiveness as a behavior or attitude the group wants to name and avoid.
- Give people credit for being able to handle more than you think; in other words, avoid deciding what someone can or cannot hear, particularly if you don't have evidence.
- When someone responds defensively, ask them to talk through what they are defending (or defending against); you might find some rich information that way.
- Discuss the ways in which defensiveness or resistance to new ideas gets in the way of the mission. Use your own experience with your own defensiveness and resistance as an example.
- Know that resentment is a form of defensiveness and signals that the person feeling the resentment feels unseen and unheard. Or is afraid of losing power.

Reflection Prompts to Consider:

- How does defensiveness show up in my work?
- How have I seen defensiveness show up in my classroom?
- When have I seen defensiveness show up in my department?
- What is one way I can disrupt defensiveness in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level?
 - What additional supports do I need to do this work?

Denial

Examples of Denial:

- Denying what another person is saying about the ways in which white supremacy and/or racism are showing up in an interaction or space.
- A pattern that often has a white person with different levels of power denying what a Black, Indigenous or Person of Color or a whole community is saying about their experience of racism.
- Claiming the right to define what is and what is not racism.
- Insisting that white supremacy and racism require intent. Attempting to separate intent from impact in order to claim that if racism is not intended, then it is not happening.
- Refusing to consider or acknowledge the historical legacy of white supremacy and

racism and the structural nature of racial disparities. Rewriting, reframing, or omitting histories to erase or downplay racism.

- The refusal or inability to feel the emotional cost of racism. At worst suggesting that acts of violence and rage targeting BIPOC communities and people are deserved and/or necessary and at best ignoring or downplaying acts of violence and rage directed at BIPOC communities and people.
- Insisting that individual or collectively, a person or group is free from racialized conditioning, leading to statements like “I don’t see color,” and “we’re all the same.”

Ways to Disrupt Denial:

- Assume that any naming of racism is on target. Instead of asking is it or isn’t it racism, ask how is it racism?
- Understand deep in our bones that naming racism is the first step toward repair. Learn to acknowledge any fear that naming brings up – the feeling is not wrong or right – so that you can move through the feeling and address what has been raised.
- For white people: Avoid taking accusations of racism or collusion in racism personally. Avoid defending yourself. Learn to say, “tell me more.” Understand your racism (or your collusion in racism) as conditioning, not as who you essentially are. Understand that awareness of your conditioning is necessary if you are going to change and grow.
- Call yourself and others in, not out. We will not grow the movement through shame and blame, even though shame and blame are necessary elements of our own individual and personal development. We will grow the movement by holding each other accountable from a position of care, kindness, and love. Sometimes we will have to employ tough love and always the goal is to avoid throwing ourselves or anyone else away.
- Know our history. Learn our history. Understand how racist patterns repeat over and over again. Ake the time to learn where you live and work and love and the Indigenous history of the peoples who lived and worked and loved there before you (or live there now). Take the time to know both the history of white supremacy patterns and the stories of resistance and resilience. Plant yourself in the river of resistance and resilience.
- Learn about the history of the recurring structural power, privilege, and benefits bestowed on the white group at the expense of BIPOC people and communities. Understand the price paid.

Reflection Prompts to Consider:

- How does denial show up in my work/personal life?
- How have I seen denial show up in my classroom?
- When have I seen denial show up in my department?
- What is one way I can disrupt denial in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level?
 - What additional supports do I need to do this work?

**Quantity over
Quality**

&

**Progress is
Bigger & More**

Examples of Quantity over Quality:

- Most or all resources are directed toward producing quantitatively measurable goals.
- Things that can be counted are more highly valued than things that cannot. For example, numbers of people attending a meeting, newsletter circulation, money raised and spent are valued more than the quality of relationships, democratic decision-making, ability to constructively deal with conflict, morale and mutual support.
- Little or no value is attached to process in the internalized belief that if it can't be measured, it has no value.
- Discomfort with emotion and feelings.
- Little or 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 (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).
- Connected to perfectionism, one right way, I'm the only one, and right to comfort because of the ways in which process, which cannot be numerically measured, requires emotional presence and intelligence whereas product when it can be numerically measured, feels "safe" and controllable.

Examples of Progress is Bigger & More Thinking:

- How we define success (success is always bigger, more).
- An organization that assumes the goal is to grow – add staff, add projects, or serve more people regardless of how well they can serve them; raise more money, or gain more influence and power for its own sake – all without regard to the organization's mission or especially the people and/or living beings that the organization is in relationship with.
- Gives no value, not even negative value, to its cost; for example, increases accountability to funders as the budget grows in ways that leave those served exploited, excluded, or underserved as we focus on how many we are serving instead of the quality of service or values created by the ways in which we serve.
- Little or no ability to consider the cost of growth in social, emotional, psychic, embodied, spiritual, and financial realms.
- Valuing those who have "progressed" over those who "have not" – where progress is measured in degrees, grades, money, power, status, material belongings – in ways that erase lived experience and wisdom/knowledge that is rendered invisible – tending, cleaning, feeding, nurturing, caring for, raising up, supporting.
- Focus on getting bigger (in size, transactional power, numbers) leading to little or no ability to consider the cost of getting big in social, emotional, psychic, embodied, spiritual, and financial realms.

Ways to Disrupt Quantity over Quality & Progress is Bigger & More Thinking:

- Honoring the ancient [Haudenosaunee](#) (Iroquois) philosophy that the decisions we make today should result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future.

- Ensure 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 relationship to living beings, 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 establish goals and evaluate performance holistically. For example, set both content and process goals (what you do and how you do it) aligned with the values of the organization and/or community.
- Make sure you and/or your community or organization has a values statement that expressed the ways in which you want to do your work; create this as a living document that people use in their day-to-day work.
- Learn to recognize those times when you need to go off the planned agenda in order to address people’s underlying concerns with the knowledge that doing so will result in a more solid product in the long term.
- Distinguish between growth, which is necessary and organic, and the conditioned desire for “more” – more stuff, more transactional power, more people, more...for its own sake.

Reflection Prompts to Consider:

- How does quantity over quality thinking and/or progress is bigger & more thinking show up in my work?
- How have I seen either or both characteristics show up in my classroom?
- When have I seen either or both characteristics show up in my department?
- What is one way I can disrupt these characteristics in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level?
 - What additional supports do I need to do this work?

Worship of the Written Word

Examples of Worship of the Written Word:

- If it’s not in a memo, it doesn’t exist.
- If it’s not grammatically “correct,” it has no value.
- If it’s not properly cited according to academic rules that many people don’t know or have access to, it’s not legitimate.
- An inability or refusal to acknowledge information that is shared through stories, embodied knowing, intuition and the wide range of ways that we individually and collectively learn and know.
- Academic standards require “original” work when our knowledge and knowing almost always builds on the knowledge and knowing of others, of each other.
- Those with strong documentation and writing skills are more highly valued, even in organizations where the ability to relate to others is key to the mission.
- Continued frustration that people and communities don’t respond to written communication; blaming people and communities for their failure to respond.

Ways to Disrupt Worship of the Written Word:

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

- Figure out what actually needs to be written down and come up with alternative ways to document what is happening; encourage creative ways of documenting or recording or reflecting what you are learning and what you feel you know.
- Dedicate time to practicing and honoring other ways of knowing and expression: oral storytelling, embodied learning, visual and movement art, silence, meditation, singing, dancing.
- Make sure anything written can be clearly understood (avoid academic language, ‘buzz’ words, acronyms, etc.).
- Practice listening; because our culture doesn’t value oral traditions or storytelling wisdom, we are out of listening practice or remembering how to hold a spoken word with weight (without having to write it down).
- Acknowledge and honor diverse and interconnected sources of wisdom.
- Appreciate when others learn from and expand on your knowledge and writing; see yourself and position yourself as one person in a stream of knowing and learning.

Reflection Prompts to Consider:

- How does worship of the written word show up in my work?
- How have I seen worship of the written word show up in my classroom?
- When have I seen worship of the written word show up in my department?
- What is one way I can disrupt worship of the written word in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level?
 - What additional supports do I need to do this work?

Either/Or Thinking & the Binary

Examples of Either/Or Thinking & the Binary:

- Positioning or presenting options or issues as either/or – good/bad, right/wrong, with us/against us.
- Little or no sense of the possibilities of both/and.
- Trying to simplify complex things, for example believing that poverty is simply the result of lack of education.
- Closely linked to perfectionism because binary thinking makes it difficult to learn from mistakes or accommodate conflict.
- Connected to conflict and increased sense of urgency, as people feel they have to make a decision to do either this or that, with no time or encouragement to consider alternatives, particularly those which may require more time or resources.
- A strategy used by those with a clear agenda or goal to push those who are still thinking or reflecting to make a choice between ‘a’ or ‘b’ without acknowledging a need for time and creativity to come up with more options.
- A strategy used to pit oppressions against each other rather than to recognize the ways in which racism and classism intersect, the ways in which both intersect with heterosexism and ageism and other categories of oppression.

Ways to Disrupt Either/Or Thinking & the Binary:

- Notice when you or others use ‘either/or’ language and make time to come up with more than two alternatives.

- Notice when you or others are simplifying complex issues, particularly when the stakes seem high, or an urgent decision needs to be made.
- When urgency arises and binary thinking emerges, slow down and encourage people to take a pause, a breath, restate the goal, and dive deeper into alternatives.
- Avoid making decisions under extreme pressure and work to distinguish what is actual pressure and what is pressure that you or others are creating.
- Avoid trying to assign a single cause to a problem or a challenge; acknowledge the ways in which oppressions intersect and reinforce each other as well as the ways in which oppression can be operating at the interpersonal, institutional, and cultural levels.

Reflection Prompts to Consider:

- How does either/or thinking show up in my work?
- How have I seen either/or thinking show up in my classroom?
- When have I seen either/or thinking show up in my department?
- What is one way I can disrupt either/or thinking in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level?
 - What additional supports do I need to do this work?

Power Hoarding

Examples of Power Hoarding:

- Little, if any, value around sharing power.
- Power is 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 of 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; blaming the messenger rather than focusing on the message.

Ways to Disrupt Power Hoarding:

- Include power-sharing as an explicit organizational or community value.
- Discuss and define what good leadership looks like and include how a good leader develops the power and skills of others.
- If you are a leader and/or hold power, understand that change is inevitable and challenges to your leadership are often healthy and productive; adopt the "tell me more" approach to challenges.
- If you are a leader and/or hold power, avoid taking challenges personally and return to the principle of collective thinking and action; ask for help with your leadership, particularly when feeling highly defensive.
- Make sure the organization is focused on the vision, mission, and values rather than staying "in business" for the sake of staying in business.
- If you are a leader and/or hold power, realize your ability and responsibility to support others to hold power well and responsibly, to support others to be

successful and to shine, to mentor and support others; realize your ability to support and help others grow reflects well on you (as opposed to attitudes and behaviors that stem from fear, desire to control and/or micro-manage).

Reflection Prompts to Consider:

- How does power hoarding show up in my work?
- How have I seen power hoarding show up in my classroom?
- When have I seen power hoarding show up in my department?
- What is one way I can disrupt power hoarding in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level?
 - What additional supports do I need to do this work?

Fear of Open Conflict

Examples of Fear of Open Conflict:

- People in power are scared of expressed 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 or insistence on being polite; setting the rules for how ideas or information or differences of opinion need to be shared in order to be heard (in other words, requiring that people “calm down” if they are angry when anger often contains deep wisdom about where the underlying hurt and harm lies).
- Equating the raising of difficult issues with being impolite, rude, or out of line; punishing people either overtly or subtly for speaking out about their truth and/or experience.
- Labeling emotion as “irrational” or anti-intellectual or inferior, which means failing to recognize the importance of emotional intelligence.
- Pretending or insisting that our point of view is grounded in the “rational” or the intellectual when we are in fact masking our emotions with what appear to be rational or intellectual arguments.

Ways to Disrupt 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 them.
- Once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity to revisit it and see how it might have been handled differently.
- Be transparent about power, so that everyone understands who makes the final decision and/or how the final decision is made before you dive into the conflict.
- Invite a third or “neutral” party to support exploration of the conflict.

Reflection Prompts to Consider:

- How does fear of open conflict show up in my work?
- How have I seen fear of open conflict show up in my classroom?
- When have I seen fear of open conflict show up in my department?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is one way I can disrupt fear of open conflict in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What additional supports do I need to do this work?
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Individualism</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">&</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>I'm the Only One</u></p>	<p>Examples of Individualism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For white people: seeing yourselves and/or demanding to be seen as an individual and not as part of the white group. • Failure to acknowledge any of the ways dominant identities – gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, age, education – are informed by belonging to a dominant group that shapes cultural norms and behaviors. • For BIPOC people: individualism forces the classic double bind when BIPOC people are accused of not being “team players” – in other words, punishment or repercussions for acting as an individual if and when doing so “threatens” the team. • For white people: a culturally supported focus on determining whether an individual is racist or not while ignoring cultural, institutional, and systemic racism; the strongly felt need by many if not most white people to claim they are “not racist” while their conditioning into racism is relentless and unavoidable. • The desire for individual recognition and credit; failure to acknowledge how what we know is informed by so many others. • Valuing competition more highly than cooperation; where collaboration is valued, little time or resources are devoted to developing skills in how to collaborate and cooperate. • Very connected to “one right way,” perfectionism,” “qualified,” and “defensiveness and denial.” <p>Examples of I'm the Only One:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An aspect of individualism, the belief that if something is going to get done “right,” ‘I’ have to do it. • Connected to the characteristic of “one right way,” the belief that “I” can determine the right way, am entitled and/or qualified to do so, in isolation from and without accountability to those most impacted by how I define the right way. • Little or no ability to delegate work to others, micromanagement. • Based in deep fear of loss of control, which requires an illusion of control. • Defining leadership as those most in front and most vocal. <p>Ways to Disrupt Individualism and I'm the Only One Thinking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to understand all the ways we are informed by our dominant identities and how our membership in dominant identity groups informs us both overtly and covertly (while realizing too that these identities do not have to define us); understand how membership in a dominant group (the white group, the male group, the hetero group, the wealthy group) extends psychic, spiritual, and emotional benefits as well as material benefits. • Acknowledge that all white people have internalized racist conditioning and that an anti-racist commitment is not about being “good” or “bad,” it’s about figuring out what we are going to do about our conditioning.

- Do our personal work while also bringing focus to cultural, institutional, and systemic manifestations of white supremacy and racism.
- Name teamwork and collaboration as important personal and group values; acknowledge that they take more time, particularly at the front end and yield a better result with higher buy-in and higher ability to take shared risks.
- Create a culture where people feel they can bring problems to the group; use meetings as a place to solve problems, not just a place to report activities.
- Hold ourselves and each other accountable to a shared definition of leadership that assumes a collaborative and collective approach.

Reflection Prompts to Consider:

- How does individualism and/or I’m the only one thinking show up in my work?
- How have I seen either or both characteristics show up in my classroom?
- When have I seen either or both characteristics show up in my department?
- What is one way I can disrupt these characteristics in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level?
 - What additional supports do I need to do this work?

Right to Comfort

Examples of 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. For example, targeting and isolating those who name racism rather than addressing the actual racism that is being named.
- Demanding, requiring, expecting apologies or other forms of “I didn’t mean it” when faced with accusations of colluding with racism.
- Feeling entitled to name what is and isn’t racism.
- White people (or those with dominant identities) equating individual acts of unfairness with systemic racism (or other forms of oppression).

Ways to Disrupt Right to Comfort:

- Understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning.
- Welcome discomfort and learn to sit with it before responding or acting.
- Deepen your political analysis of racism and oppression so you have a strong understanding of how your personal experiences and feelings fit into a larger picture.
- Avoid taking everything personally.
- Welcome honest and hard feedback as the gift it is, knowing that people could so easily choose to stay silent and talk about you behind your back rather than gift you with their truth about how your attitudes and/or behavior are causing a problem.
- When you have a different point of view, seek to understand what you’re being told and assume there is a good reason for what is being said; seek to find and understand that good reason (without labeling the other person).

Reflection Prompts to Consider:

- How does “a belief in the right to comfort” show up in my work?
- How have I seen right to comfort show up in my classroom?
- When have I seen right to comfort show up in my department?
- What is one way I can disrupt right to comfort in my personal life? On an interpersonal level? Institutional level?
 - What additional supports do I need to do this work?