



Examining the Impact of White Supremacy Cultural Norms on Organizational Learning: Findings from an Action Research Study

Author

ERICA BARTON

Human Resources Manager for
Organizational Learning and Development
University of Washington
ericab4@uw.edu

ALTHOUGH BARRIERS TO WORKPLACE LEARNING are well documented in the literature, the intersection of organizational theory and White supremacy is underexamined, resulting in a White-neutral lens. As described by Tema Okun, there are several characteristics of White supremacy cultural norms that manifest in organizations, and the purpose of this study is to examine how they impact organizational learning. This action research study involved two cycles of inquiry. In Cycle 1, interviews were conducted with housing practitioners to understand the conditions impacting learning in the workplace, and the findings indicated that White supremacy cultural norms negatively impacted learning. Cycle 2 involved the development, implementation, and evaluation of an online learning module focused on defensive routines, a characteristic of White supremacy cultural norms, which participants described as negatively impacting their learning. Post-intervention interviews were conducted with university student affairs practitioners. Findings from Cycle 2 showed that the online module was effective in helping practitioners develop the knowledge and skills to identify and disrupt defensive reactions in themselves and others. For Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) participants, in particular, the module created feelings of validation. These findings provide a potential road map for future equity training and offer housing practitioners insight into specific barriers to organizational learning.

.....

As influencers in students' learning experience, housing practitioners must be learners themselves. Understanding the barriers that impact workplace learning enables housing organizations to not only disrupt these barriers but also to maximize learning potential. Dominant cultural norms shape individuals' mental models, "the deeply held images of how the world works, images that limit us to ways of thinking and acting" (Senge, 2006, p. 163). Developing insight about one's mental models empowers practitioners to have agency over the forces that guide behaviors, interactions, and decisions. "The inertia of deeply entrenched mental models can overwhelm even the best systemic insights" and "impede learning" (Senge, 2006, p. 167), making the unraveling of mental models an imperative for learning organizations.

Grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT; Ladson-Billings, 2013), this action research study aimed to illuminate how White supremacy cultural norms that manifest in organizations impact workplace learning and how individuals can develop the knowledge, skills, and motivation to identify and disrupt these norms in their daily practice. Findings reveal that White supremacy cultural norms negatively impact workplace learning

and that the online module was effective in helping practitioners develop the knowledge and skills to identify and disrupt defensive reactions in themselves and others. The findings offer learning organizations both insight into the barriers impacting workplace learning and a potential road map for future equity training initiatives.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

The researcher, a White woman, was exposed to the work of Tema Okun, which was originally published in 2001 and updated in 2021, who described the characteristics of White supremacy cultural norms, as well as presenting antidotes to combat these norms. The researcher made the choice to investigate and disrupt these norms in her own daily practice. In the process, the researcher discovered that pathways to her learning expanded as she reconciled her own complicity with White supremacy, giving way to a critical curiosity that led to this research. The researcher engaged with stakeholders in her institution, had regular discussions with thought partners, and practiced regular critical reflection throughout the research to reveal and challenge assumptions.

WHITE SUPREMACY AND LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

Race is a social construct (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Ray, 2019; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017) that has been used as early as Aristotle's climate theory (Kendi, 2016) to differentiate and prioritize White bodies over dark bodies (Kendi, 2016; Lewis & Diamond, 2015). In the social construction of race, Whiteness is neutral (Bohomoos, 2019; Leonardo, 2002; Morrison, 1992; Ray, 2019). For White individuals who are socialized to see White privilege as invisible (McIntosh, 2004), Whiteness becomes visible only in relation to racial Others (Macalpine, 2005; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). This pervasive, unchecked White privilege, normalcy, and domination is what constitutes White supremacy (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Grounded in systems and structures, White supremacy is enacted by individuals (West, 2003) and passed from generation to generation through "the racialized trauma that wounds so many American bodies," as well as their hearts and minds (Menakem, 2017, "Watch Your Body," para. 6). White supremacy and domination are not innate, fixed characteristics of White identity; rather, they are "constituted through individual performative acts" (Bettez, 2011, p. 172) that manifest as characteristics of White supremacy cultural norms, such as perfectionism, individualism, defensiveness, paternalism, quantity over quality, either/or thinking, objectivity, and the right to comfort (Okun, 2021). In her work to describe these characteristics, Okun (2021) also provides antidotes that can enable organizations to disrupt the characteristics of White supremacy.

Despite claims that management theories originated in the development of U.S. railroads, they actually began with the economy built by slavery, with the earliest references to management coming from instruction manuals and guides for how planta-

As influencers in students' learning experience, housing practitioners must be learners themselves.

tion owners should manage enslaved individuals in order to maximize profits (Cooke, 2003). Despite advances in leadership theory in such concepts as servant leadership, distributive leadership, and shared leadership, much of the literature about management denies the history of slavery (Cooke, 2003) and presents a White-neutral lens (Ray, 2019; Wingfield & Alston, 2014), rendering the experience of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) staff invisible.

White supremacy and racial segregation are maintained in organizations through hierarchy. Predominantly White leaders at the top of the organizational hierarchy establish the vision and values, while BIPOC staff, disproportionately represented at the lower levels of the organizational hierarchy, are responsible for operationalizing and maintaining a White vision (Wingfield & Alston, 2014). At the lower levels of these hierarchies, BIPOC staff tend to identify interpersonal interactions as the cause of racial discrimination (Wingfield & Chavez, 2020), allowing White elite leaders to continue to ignore and deny the structural and historical context of White supremacy. In addition to maintaining White dominance and racial segregation, hierarchical structures impact organizational learning. Results from a study of how structure affects learning revealed that organizations with a strict hierarchical structure demonstrated lower organizational learning performance than did flat or hybrid structured organizations (Koochborfardhaghighi & Altmann, 2017).

BARRIERS TO LEARNING IN ORGANIZATIONS

Organizational learning is critical to organizational health and performance (Mallén et al., 2016): “The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people’s commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization” (Senge, 2006, p. 4). As reflected in a study analyzing 251 organizations, “organizational learning capability increases organizational performance” (Mallén et al., 2016, p. 481). Additionally, the culture of organizational learning is strongly correlated with “employee turnover intention” (Joo, 2010, p. 69). Organizational learning involves intersecting routines and practices, including personal mastery, shared vision, team learning, systems thinking, and interrogation of mental models (Senge, 2006). In a comprehensive literature review, Schilling and Kluge (2009) identified multiple barriers to organizational learning, including defensive routines, rigid organizational structures, fear of losing power, protection of the status quo, and avoidance of mistakes. Similar findings were echoed in a study examining the barriers to organizational learning that perpetuate discrimination against employees with disabilities; discriminatory and defensive organizational routines were the most frequent barriers to organizational learning (Wooten & James, 2005). Overlaying these barriers with Okun’s characteristics of White supremacy presents parallels that are difficult to ignore. (See Table 1, page 16.)

TABLE 1

Parallels Between Barriers to Organizational Learning and Characteristics of White Supremacy Cultural Norms

Characteristics of White supremacy cultural norms (Okun, 2021)	Barriers to organizational learning (Schilling & Kluge, 2009)
• Individualism • Perfectionism • Defensiveness • Quantity over quality • Sense of urgency • Fear of open conflict • Worship of the written word • Objectivity • Right to comfort • Progress defined as bigger and more • Paternalism • Power hoarding	• Status quo culture • Blame culture • Defensive routines • Fear of disadvantage • Restricting power structure • Analysis that obscures process efforts • Organizational silence • Monolithic work culture • Ego-defense of organizational identity • Over-confidence of managers in existing practices • Forced top-down change • Ineffective resource allocation • Low degree of openness to new ideas • Previous conflicts

METHODOLOGY

This study was grounded in the tradition of action research and qualitative research. Action research involves undergoing cycles of inquiry to understand a problem of practice and then implementing and assessing potential solutions to an identified problem (Stringer, 1996). Critical Race Theory provided the theoretical framework for this study's purpose, research questions, and methodology: endeavoring to disrupt racism; center race, racism, and racialized power dynamics in social realities and interactions; and transform oppressive power relations (Hylton, 2012).

The study involved two cycles of inquiry. The first cycle involved 11 semi-structured interviews with currently employed, full-time housing practitioners to understand the problem of practice. Participants were from multiple housing organizations within the Northwest, and their roles represented multiple functional domains of housing organizations that reflected different levels of positionality within organizational hierarchies. The second cycle of inquiry involved the development, implementation, and

evaluation of an intervention to improve the problem of practice illuminated in Cycle 1. The intervention was evaluated through 10 semi-structured interviews with student affairs practitioners. Participants in Cycle 2 were from one large public university, representing a cross section of student affairs roles, and held varied levels of positionality within organizational structures. Throughout the data analysis and results sections that follow, pseudonyms were not used, a strategy intended as a form of resistance to the lure of individualism, a characteristic of White supremacy (Okun, 2021). As DiAngelo (2015) maintains,

The ideology of individualism is a story line that creates, communicates, reproduces, and reinforces the concept that each of us is a unique individual and that our group memberships, such as race, class, or gender, are irrelevant to our opportunities. (p. 9)

Cycle 1: Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using purposeful and snowball sampling (Stringer, 1996), and participants were asked to describe the conditions that support and hinder their workplace learning. During the interviews, they completed a sorting activity in which they were asked to sort the characteristics of White supremacy cultural norms and their antidotes into categories of most helpful or least helpful to their learning. The norms were described but not labeled in the sorting activity.

The interviews were transcribed and coded using process codes (Saldaña, 2016). Codes were defined and described in a codebook, and pattern codes were then used to clarify themes. Initial process codes and notes from the sorting activity are reflected in Table 2 (*see page 18*).

Cycle 1: Results

Two thematic statements emerged from the Cycle 1 data analysis: (1) Hierarchical routines, perfectionism, defensive routines, expectations to be more and do more, and learning one right way hinder learning in the workplace. (2) The ability to ask questions, collaborate, bounce ideas off colleagues, and experiment with new information support workplace learning. Participants consistently identified the characteristics of White supremacy cultural norms as being the least helpful to their learning, and the antidotes—the choice of something different—as being the most helpful. The results from the sorting activity are reflected in Table 3 (*see page 19*).

All 11 participants identified defensiveness as negatively impacting their learning. One described a defensive routine in a story about engaging in a conversation about the use of the phrase “grandfathered in”; when they noted that the phrase was racist, their colleague became defensive.

They immediately just started like getting an angry tone and saying, “well, I guess I’ll never just say anything again. Like I can’t say anything anymore. Everyone’s gonna get offended. I’m not offended by it.” Um, and then they shut down.

As the participant described, defensive routines stymie the learning potential inherent in feedback.

TABLE 2**Cycle 1 Process Codes**

Question	Initial process codes and notes from sorting activity
What conditions are harmful to your learning?	• Forcing one way (one right way) • Learning alone (individualism) • Not allowing questions and discussion
How do you experience hierarchy?	• Getting in trouble for stepping out of lane (power hoarding) • Managers talking over subordinates (power hoarding) • Managers speaking for subordinates (power hoarding) • Feeling silenced
How do you experience defensive routines?	• Hearing anger (defensiveness) • Shutting down (defensiveness) • Feeling defeated (defensiveness) • Feeling silenced (defensiveness)
How do you experience perfectionism?	• Avoiding mistakes (perfectionism) • Hiding mistakes (perfectionism) • Constant revising (perfectionism) • Doing more (quantity over quality) • Hustling for worth (quantity over quality)
What conditions are helpful to your learning?	• Discussing ideas (collaboration) • Collaborating (collaboration) • Asking questions (collaboration/learning from mistakes) • Engaging authentically

The ability to process feedback and listen to new ideas is critical for workplace learning. Processing feedback allows individuals to identify gaps in their thinking, improve congruence between intent and impact, reimagine possibilities, and learn from the lived experience of others. Defensive routines are reflected in the literature as a critical barrier to organizational learning (Schilling & Kluge, 2009; Senge, 2006; Wooten & James, 2005). The impact of defensive routines as reflected by participants and the literature established the direction for Cycle 2.

Race is a social construct that has been used as early as Aristotle's climate theory to differentiate and prioritize White bodies over dark bodies.

Cycle 2: Intervention, Data Collection, and Results

Cycle 2 employed an online learning module focused on defensive reactions. The module explained the neuroscience of defensive reactions, the early warning signs of these reactions, how defensive reactions have been used throughout history to maintain racism, and examples of everyday defensive reactions in the workplace. The examples in the module strategically avoided identity-centered workplace examples so that learners could see the function of a defensive reaction without the emotional charge associated with identity. Post-intervention interviews were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the online module.

TABLE 3

Participant Responses to Sorting Activity (N = 11)

Okun's characteristics of White supremacy cultural norms			Okun's antidotes		
The Characteristics	Least helpful to learning	Most helpful to learning	Most helpful to learning	Least helpful to learning	The Antidotes
Individualism	10	1	10	1	Collaboration and teamwork
Perfectionism	11	0	11	0	Mistakes viewed as opportunities to learn and grow
Sense of urgency	10	1	10	1	Sufficient time to think and discuss
Paternalism	11	0	11	0	Decision making understandable to all; those impacted are involved in decision making
Power hoarding	11	0	11	0	Sharing power
Objectivity	10	1	10	1	All perspectives validated
Right to comfort	10	1	10	1	Discomfort important to learning and growth
Defensiveness	11	0	11	0	Defensiveness named and challenged
Worship of written word	9	2	9	2	Allowance for many forms of expression
Progress is bigger and more	10	1	10	1	Realistic work plans that attend to all costs, not just the bottom line
Either/or thinking	11	0	11	0	Finding room in the middle
Quantity over quality	9	2	9	2	Process valued as much as product

Interviews were coded using oral coding, a process in which the researcher listens to the interview recordings repeatedly, noting salient passages and being attuned to tone and emotional nuance (Saldaña, 2016). Participants noted that the module helped them become aware of their defensive reactions, develop a shared language, and take more time to listen when engaging with others. BIPOC participants commented that the module created a feeling of validation and being seen. Mindful awareness of defensive reactions supported participants in their interactions with others. As one participant described,

For me it was definitely recognizing my own defensive responses and the physical reactions that I get, like my heart racing. Now I have a name for it. I always felt it when somebody was talking to me and I felt the need to defend myself, but I never had the ability to put that word to it and so now I can recognize it and am able to be calmer and more open with others.

The participant's awareness supported a shift in behavior. With their ability to recognize defensive reactions, they were able to calm themselves and be more open in a conversation. And, as another participant clarified, the development of shared language supported conversations with colleagues.

A lot of us took the training, so we have a shared understanding, at least, that defensiveness is a thing that we have to address. The shared language, I think, is the most important thing. The fact that the training put out there, that this is something we all have to deal with. It's not blaming any one person or saying you're a bad person, it's just saying, this is how we are is helpful. The different examples and the different names for the types of defensive reactions, I think, are helpful and that they're comparable, so like I would be able to say, "Oh, remember from the training, when someone tried to explain away something—that's kind of what I'm feeling here."

Shared language supported them in disrupting defensive routines without triggering feelings of accusation and blame.

Participants reported that the module validated their lived experience, helping them feel seen. This was particularly affirmed by BIPOC participants.

I definitely felt validated for some of the things that I thought were just in my head. As a young Person of Color, there's not very many of me in the Department, you know of my identity. I encounter a lot in a very White male-dominated role. It was validating to see that what I had experienced was not just in my head. It was validating.

The training validated the participants' experience, allowing them to see that defensive reactions were real and not simply a figment of their imaginations. As another

Explicitly naming the historical and systematic context of White supremacy is critical for the success of antiracism efforts.

participant, who became emotional while discussing the impact of the vignettes presented in the online module, described their experience,

I think what's important for me to remember as a Person of Color who lives and breathes in a White environment is that my experience is not, and shouldn't be, doubted right. It doesn't need to be like shuffled to the side and hidden away, and you know, like I don't need to just grin and bear it. In the moments where I'm experiencing exactly those things [the examples of everyday defensiveness], where suddenly I'm doubting myself. I'm getting a little emotional. Suddenly I'm doubting myself because the tables have turned and now it's my fault, and you know I shouldn't have entered into this conversation in the first place. The training was very affirming; as you can see, I'm having a moment. I didn't expect to be emotional while talking to you, but it speaks to the power of what you're doing like you're helping people, not just in that moment [to] unpack defensiveness, right, but you're helping people navigate the environment where they are encountering that defensiveness and affirming the internal experience.

The module served as a powerful validation of this person's lived experience with defensive reactions.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: The Impact of White Supremacy Cultural Norms on Learning

White supremacy cultural norms negatively impact learning in the workplace. Participants recognized that perfectionism, defensive routines, expectations to be more and do more, demands for learning one right way, and hierarchical routines negatively impact their learning. The conditions that they identified as negatively impacting workplace learning are characterized as White supremacy cultural norms (Okun, 2021). While this finding is difficult to explicitly situate in the literature, given the fact that the intersection of White supremacy and organizational theory are underexamined (Ray, 2019; Schilling & Kluge, 2009; Wingfield & Alston, 2014), the finding is consistent with the literature. Participants emphasized that perfectionism and defensiveness negatively impact workplace learning. In an extensive literature review, Schilling and Kluge (2009) identified barriers to learning at multiple levels of an organization, from the individual, interpersonal level to the socio-environmental level. They identified many barriers to organizational learning, including avoidance of mistakes and a culture of shame, which are hallmarks of the White supremacy cultural norms of perfectionism and defensiveness (Okun, 2021).

Participants described how hierarchical routines created feelings of invisibility, rendering some voices more valuable or legitimate than others, and explained how these routines created a pyramid that was impenetrable and protective, restricting conversations with and asking questions of those at the top. These hierarchical dynamics described by participants are consistent with Wingfield and Alston's (2014) exploration of the role of hierarchical routines in maintaining White supremacy in organizations. Organizational leaders, who are disproportionately White, are responsible for establishing the vision and values of the organizations. Mid-level staff in the

organizational hierarchy are responsible for operationalizing that vision, and those at the bottom are responsible for maintaining the physical structure: cleaning, painting, serving. Those at the bottom, who are disproportionately BIPOC, are afforded little to no agency over their time, and as a result they have minimal ability to influence the vision and values set at the top (Wingfield & Alston, 2014). Traditional hierarchical structures not only systematically maintain White supremacy, but also reflect lower organizational learning performance when compared to hybrid or flat organizational structures (Koohborfardhaghighi & Altmann, 2017).

Finding 2: Learning About Defensive Routines

The online module developed for Cycle 2 was effective in helping student affairs practitioners develop the knowledge and skills to identify and disrupt defensive reactions. “The patterns of defensiveness are often deeply ingrained in how a team operates. If unrecognized, they undermine learning. If recognized and surfaced creatively, they can accelerate learning” (Senge, 2006, p. 295). Participants appreciated that the online module explored the neuroscience of a defensive reaction, which is consistent with Holmer’s (2014) conclusion that this knowledge can effectively reduce the shame associated with a defensive response.

Finding 3: Impact of the Intervention

Explicitly naming the historical and systematic context of White supremacy is critical for the success of antiracism efforts. As one participant described, the diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives taken on in most organizations are cosmetic and superficial. “It’s like standing in front of an aircraft carrier with a banner that reads ‘mission accomplished,’ when they have done nothing.” This sentiment is consistent with Lang and Yandell’s (2019) analysis that in many predominantly White colleges and universities, diversity and inclusion language functions to “conceal operations of systematic racism on campuses, producing inaction and/or ‘cosmetic’ action that does not threaten whiteness as a position of privilege and power” (p. 343). Obscuring the systematic oppression on predominantly White campuses reflects “domination by representing White beliefs of racism denial as unbiased, objective reality, eschewing race-conscious perspectives as distortions of reality” (Lang & Yandell, 2019, p. 347). BIPOC participants indicated that the defensiveness module was honest, reflected their lived experience, and created an experience of feeling seen.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings from this study offer important implications for practice, particularly for housing organizations wishing to realize their organizational learning potential or begin delivering on commitments to their antiracism efforts. As has been demonstrated by this study, defensive routines hinder learning and keep individuals and organizations locked in patterns of thought and behavior; bringing defensiveness to the surface is key to unleashing learning potential (Senge, 2006). For the participants in this study, learning about defensive routines supported the development of mindful

awareness, shared language, and the skill of taking time to listen before reacting; the defensiveness online module provides a pathway for organizational efforts to tackle a significant barrier to workplace learning.

There is limited research about what constitutes best practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion training initiatives (Cocchiara et al., 2010). The module developed for this study employed a strategic approach of allowing the learner to see themselves in everyday examples of defensive routines. These examples reflected workplace exchanges that were strategically void of identity-based interactions; as one participant reflected, the module allowed them to explore defensive routines without the “emotional charge of race.” The identity-neutral examples of defensive routines were situated within the historical and structural context of White supremacy, allowing the learner to consider behavior without triggering a defensive response in the learning process. This strategic method of allowing the learner to consider the mechanics of a defensive reaction and then situate those mechanics within a historical and structural context provides a model, proven effective through this study, to tackle barriers to workplace learning.

For organizations that have made or wish to make commitments to antiracism, the findings from this study offer a potential path forward. Identifying, examining, and reckoning with the historical and structural context of White supremacy is critical for antiracism work in predominantly White colleges and universities (Lang & Yandell, 2019). On many campuses diversity initiatives take a cosmetic or surface level approach to diversity work, which serves to obscure and deny White supremacy (Lang & Yandell, 2019). This is a function of defensive routines, which have been used throughout history to defend and maintain White supremacy (Kendi, 2016). Identifying and disrupting defensive routines is a critical step in both recognizing a barrier to organizational learning and reckoning with the buoying forces of White supremacy cultural norms that manifest in organizations. As one participant noted, they had not previously experienced a diversity training that was as honest as the defensiveness module developed for this study, and their previous experiences with diversity initiatives with cosmetic and superficial approaches had served as instruments of further marginalization.

The trauma of White body supremacy is held in White, Black, and Brown bodies, and without healing that pain, the trauma is transmitted from one generation to the next, one colleague to the next (Menakem, 2017). Defensiveness, which is one symptom of this racialized trauma (Menakem, 2022), is a natural bodily response to a perceived threat (Holmer, 2014; Menakem, 2022). “In order to process any strong emotion—as well as any situation that we perceive as a potential threat—we need first to recognize it in our body. Then we need to fully experience it—and then metabolize it” (Menakem, 2022, p. 139). Learning to identify the body’s reaction to perceived threat is

Processing feedback allows individuals to identify gaps in their thinking, improve congruence between intent and impact, reimagine possibilities, and learn from the lived experience of others.

The trauma of White body supremacy is held in White, Black, and Brown bodies, and without healing that pain, the trauma is transmitted from one generation to the next, one colleague to the next.

a crucial first step in healing. Without developing the skill to identify, name, and work through defensiveness, we keep the pain of racialized trauma trapped inside our bodies and risk putting that pain onto our colleagues and our students (Menakem, 2022).

Toni Morrison (1992) offers a revealing analogy that provides a provocative lens for organizations to engage in antiracism work: Peering into a fishbowl, you will see the fish, the bubbles, and the little plastic castle—and then slowly the fishbowl itself comes into view. Morrison identifies the fishbowl as the lens of White neutrality and White supremacy, and the fishbowl contains and controls the narrative. Fish can be added and removed, but the bowl continues to contain and control. The environment can be changed, but the bowl continues to contain and control. The fishbowl of White supremacy, with its steady service of containing and controlling, cannot be recognized and countered if it is not seen and believed.

As Wilson and colleagues (2020) noted, “Student affairs educators change lives” (p. x). Campus housing practitioners engage with students in the most intimate of settings—students’ homes—making them key student affairs educators with the ability to change lives. Can we, as housing practitioners, proclaim ourselves as educators if we are not effective learners ourselves? Can we be effective learners without understanding and disrupting barriers to our learning? Can we impact students’ lives if we cannot see and acknowledge the fishbowl of White supremacy that contains and controls? This study illuminated several barriers to learning experienced by housing practitioners and provides a pathway for disrupting defensive routines, which serve as a barrier to learning (Schilling & Kluge, 2009; Senge, 2006; Wooten & James, 2005), a characteristic of White supremacy cultural norms (Okun, 2021) and a symptom of racialized trauma (Menakem, 2022). A pathway has been forged. Will we begin the journey? ■

REFERENCES

- Bettez, S. C. (2011). Navigating the guilt vs. innocence dichotomy in teaching social justice. In N. Pope & S. P. Southall (Eds.), *South Atlantic Philosophy of Education Society 2011 Yearbook* (pp. 169–181). South Atlantic Philosophy of Education Society.
- Bohomos, J. (2019). Including critical Whiteness studies in the critical human resource development family: A proposed theoretical framework. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 69(4), 315–337.
- Cocchiara, F. K., Connerley, M. L., & Bell, M. P. (2010). “A GEM” for increasing the effectiveness of diversity training. *Human Resource Management*, 49(6), 1089–1106. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.20396>
- Cooke, B. (2003). The denial of slavery in management studies. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(8), 1895–1918. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1467-6486.2003.00405.x>
- DiAngelo, R. (2015). *White fragility: Why it's so hard to talk to White people about racism*. Beacon Press. https://www.uh.edu/caps/resources/race-related-stress-resources/_files/white-fragility.pdf
- Holmer, L. L. (2014). Understanding and reducing the impact of defensiveness on management learning. *Journal of Management Education*, 38(5), 618–641. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562913505568>
- Hylton, K. (2012). Talk the talk, walk the walk: Defining Critical Race Theory in research. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 15(1), 23–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.638862>
- Joo, B. K. (2010). Organizational commitment for knowledge workers: The roles of perceived organizational learning culture, leader-member exchange quality, and turnover intention. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 21(1), 69–85. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227541227_Organizational_Commitment_for_Knowledge_Workers_The_Roles_of_Perceived_Organizational_Learning_Culture_Leader-Member_Exchange_Quality_and_Turnover_Intention
- Kendi, I. (2016). *Stamped from the beginning: The definitive history of racist ideas in America*. Nation Books.
- Koohborfardhaghghi, S., & Altmann, J. (2017). How organizational structure affects organizational learning. *Journal of Integrated Design & Process Science*, 21(1), 43–60. <https://doi.org/10.3233/jid-2017-0006>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2013). Critical Race Theory—what it is not! In M. Lynn & A. D. Dixon (Eds.), *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in education* (pp. 34–47). Routledge.
- Lang, J. A., & Yandell, L. (2019). Diversity language as system maintenance: Toward alternative frameworks for addressing racism at predominantly White Institutions. *Christian Higher Education*, 18(5), 343–355. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15363759.2018.1517621?journalCode=uhez20>
- Leonardo, Z. (2002). The souls of White folk: Critical pedagogy, Whiteness studies, and globalization discourse. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 5(1), 29–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320120117180>
- Lewis, A. E., & Diamond, J. B. (2015). *Despite the best intentions: How racial inequality thrives in good schools*. Oxford University Press.
- Macalpine, M. (2005). “On being White: There's nothing I can say”: Exploring Whiteness and power in organizations. *Management Learning*, 36(4), 429.

- Mallén, F., Chiva, R., Alegre, J., & Guinot, J. (2016). Organicity and performance in excellent HRM organizations: The importance of organizational learning capability. *Review of Managerial Science*, 10(3), 463–485. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-014-0164-2>
- McIntosh, P. (2004). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. In P. S. Rothenberg (Ed.), *Race, class and gender in the United States: An integrated study* (pp. 177–181). Worth Publishers.
- Menakem, R. (2017). *My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and our bodies*. Central Recovery Press.
- Menakem, R. (2022). *The quaking of America: An embodied guide to navigating our nation's upheaval and racial reckoning*. Central Recovery Press.
- Morrison, T. (1992). *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*. Harvard University Press.
- Okun, T. (2021). *White supremacy culture: The characteristics*. <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/>
- Ray, V. (2019). A theory of racialized organizations. *American Sociological Review*, 84(1), 26–53. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0003122418822335>
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Schilling, J., & Kluge, A. (2009). Barriers to organizational learning: An integration of theory and research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 11(3), 337–360. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2008.00242.x>
- Senge, P. (2006). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization* (Rev. and updated ed.). Doubleday/Currency.
- Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal?* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Stringer, E. T. (1996). *Action research: A handbook for practitioners*. Sage.
- West, C. (2003). A genealogy of modern racism. In L. Cahoon (Ed.), *From modernism to postmodernism* (pp. 298–309). Blackwell Publishing.
- Wilson, B., McCallum, C., & Shupp, M. (2020). *Inclusive supervision in student affairs: A model for professional practice*. Routledge.
- Wingfield, A., & Alston, R. (2014). Maintaining hierarchies in predominantly White organizations: A theory of racialized tasks. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58(2), 274–287.
- Wingfield, A. H., & Chavez, K. (2020). Getting in, getting hired, getting sideways looks: Organizational hierarchy and perceptions of racial discrimination. *American Sociological Review*, 85(1), 31–57.
- Wooten, L. P., & James, E. H. (2005). Challenges of organizational learning: Perpetuation of discrimination against employees with disabilities. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 23(1), 123–141. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.630>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The author mentions 12 characteristics of White supremacy cultural norms. In what ways do these characteristics show up in your workplace? What about Okun's antidotes to White supremacy cultural norms?
2. What steps can you take to combat White supremacy cultural norms at your institution?
3. Participants in Cycle 1 identified defensiveness as a common experience that negatively impacted their learning. In what ways have you experienced this from colleagues? In what ways have you seen yourself becoming defensive in your role?
4. The author notes that diversity initiatives often take a cosmetic or surface-level approach to diversity work on many campuses. How do you see this happening at your institution? Does your institution have an office focused on diversity initiatives?
5. The author shares Toni Morrison's analogy about White supremacy as a fishbowl and poses a question: "Can we impact students' lives if we cannot see and acknowledge the fishbowl of White supremacy that contains and controls?" In what ways can you acknowledge the fishbowl and combat White neutrality and White supremacy in your day-to-day life?

Discussion questions developed by Kayley Carter, Virginia Tech