White Culture Handout[4]

White Culture defines what is considered normal—it creates the standard for judging values.

For example, think about by whom and how these terms are defined: good parenting, stable family, well-raised child, individual self-sufficiency and effective leadership.

In your organization, what are the characteristics of a good employee? How were you informed? If unwritten rules, how did you learn about them?

White culture privileges a focus on individuals (not groups).

Independence and autonomy are valued and rewarded. An individual is in control of their environment: "You get what you deserve."

In your organization, what is rewarded? Examples: Is there encouragement to compete? Collaborative decision-making? Decisions based on common good?

White culture assigns a higher value to some ways of behaving than others. It often defines the "other" behaviors as dangerous and/or deviant.

For example: Right to comfort. Avoid conflict and emotion. Be polite. Comfort level is defined by whites, and those that cause discomfort or are involved in conflict can be marginalized. Individual acts of unfairness become equal to the pain and discomfort of systemic racism thats daily targets people of color (based on Tema Okun's White Supremacy Culture).

In your organization, what behaviors are considered uncomfortable? E.g. conflict, loud voice, crying? How does the organization's culture respond when these behaviors happen?

Decision-making often reflects white cultural assumptions about the primacy of individuals, standards of behavior and the use of power "over" others.

For example: Deciding and enforcing, either/or thinking, those less affected define the problem and solution.

Reflect on the different groups you belong to. Who is included in the decision-making process? What is the rationale? Is the process different on paper vs. in reality?

White culture values certain ways of knowing and not others.

For example: If you can't measure it, it is not of value. Focus on cause and effect relationships and rational linear thinking.

In your organization, who or what informs you that a program/service is working? How is success defined? Who decides what is sufficient time?

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4 White Culture description comes from many sources, including: Tema Okun, *White Supremacy Culture, 2001;* Judith Katz, *Some Aspects and Assumptions of White Culture in the United States, 1985;* Robette Ann Dias, *Transforming Institutional Values: Revisited*, 2008; Joseph Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America*, p. 234, 2007; Barbara Major, Chapter 7–"How does White Privilege Show Up in Foundation and Community Initiatives?", *Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building*, 2005.