

# 8 ASPECTS OF WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE

*An overview of the aspects of white supremacy culture that we help transform, with individuals, organizations, and systems*

*...Ad some quick ways we ca get FREE!*

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**F I E R R O**   
C O N S U L T I N G

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# Origins

*White supremacy pretends that there is a hierarchy of human value. We uphold that fiction when we believe that some parts of ourselves are superior to other parts. When we buy into this, we never get to feel truly whole.*

In 2001, Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun wrote an article on white supremacy culture in organizations. We build upon and expand that work here.

All humans are equal in dignity. It is pure fiction to think of some people as superior to others. Life is sacred and magical. There is no above and below.

Our institutions were built on the lie that rich, white, straight men are superior. We uphold that lie when we believe that only the aspects of ourselves that these institutions value are valuable. I'm proposing we look at these eight false beliefs.

## **Eight false beliefs:**

1. Mind over Heart/Body,
2. Blame over Responsibility,
3. I over We,
4. Tasks over People,
5. Safety over Honesty,
6. Control over Ambiguity,
7. Performance over Authenticity,
8. Saviorism over Equity

As we become aware of these false beliefs, we will notice them in our minds, our organizations, our communities, and our society. As we transform our minds, we transform our society, too.

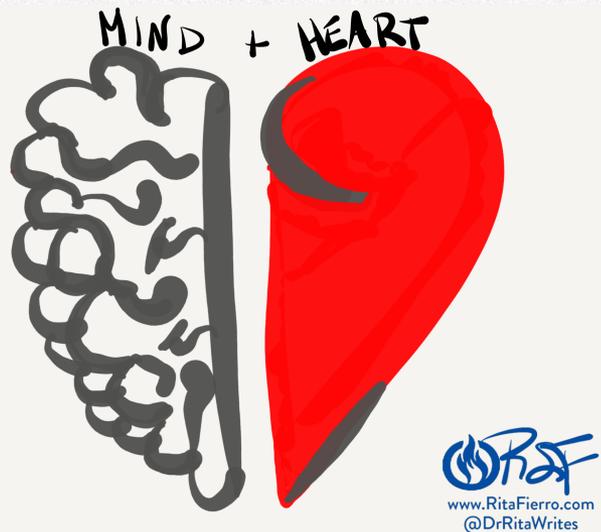
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*We cultivate our freedom by recognizing and denouncing these 8 fake hierarchies.*

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# Mind Over Heart/Body



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*When we place our minds over our hearts and bodies, we feel split and not enough: we rush from one thing to the next with little or no satisfaction.*

The Cartesian premise, “I am I think therefore I am” set the standard for European illuminism and its precedence of mind over emotion. It is no coincidence that this current of European thought became prominent in the same years the slave trade was at its maximum expansion. Folks of color were chastised for being supposedly dominated by their emotions—while Europeans gave themselves the excuse to pillage, occupy and steal from native people around the world.

Indigenous traditions do not place the mind over feelings and the body because they know that the mind’s tendency to feel separate and superior leads to violence. This is detrimental to the long-term health of community, land and the world. not connection. In *Sandtalk*, Tyson Yunkaporta says that aboriginal Australian culture was created specifically to temper and minimize the aspect of every human being wants to be better than another.

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*We cultivate our freedom by choosing to respect, nurture, and cultivate all aspects of ourselves: mind, body, and spirit. We can be present to our feelings, even when we may not always choose to act from them.*

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# Blame Over Responsibility



*When we choose blame over responsibility, we become invested in our own victimhood: we have no experience of our own personal power.*

In *Restoring Sanctuary*, Sandra Bloom speaks about the trauma triangle: a pattern of behavior that has the victim, savior, and perpetrator locked into the same role, time and time again. Perpetrators are often victims who have promised themselves: never again. In their attempt to escape victimhood, they become aggressors. When we blame others for our behaviors, we give them more power than we believe we have ourselves: we perpetuate harm by making ourselves small. We do this at times because we are more invested in being right than we are in being powerful forgers of our own destiny.

This can become a trap with no way out. Releasing our victim story requires we take responsibility for our own lives.

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*We cultivate our freedom by taking responsibility for our choices and our lives. We ask people for what we need, we take care of our own needs when others cannot.*

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# I Over We



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*When we believe that we need to protect our own needs against the group, the competition wears us out: we feel isolated and alone.*

Unlike the cartesian principle of *I think therefore I am*, in many indigenous cultures the founding principle is: *I am because we are*. The book *Muntu* by Janheinz Jahn mentions this. In indigenous communities, the proof of existence is in the community, not individual. Because of this, western scholars assumed that in indigenous culture the community is *over* the individual. That is not true.

Many would argue that in their tending to community, individuals are tended to as well. An example of this is the creation of common lands as a buffer in between tribal lands-- designed for any human being to draw from in case of necessity. The existence of common lands reduced conflict among different tribes and ethnic groups by ensuring that the resources of mother nature were used to satisfy the needs of all of humanity. The Irish, the Afar in Ethiopia, and many Native American tribes used common lands for this purpose.

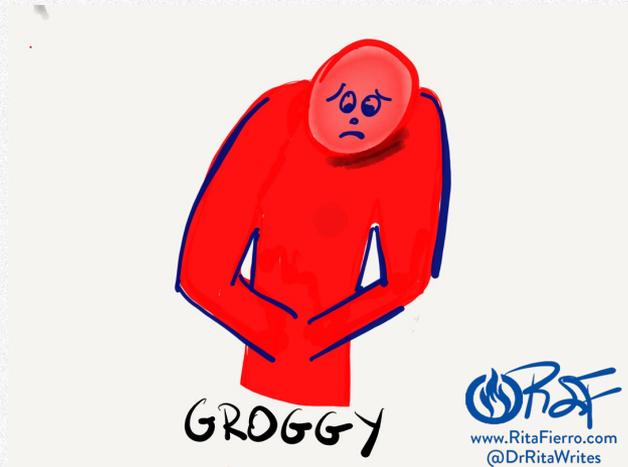
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*We cultivate our freedom by honoring the needs of the groups we belong to and discover ways to meet our own needs, as well.*

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# Tasks Over People



*When we place tasks over people, we are stuck in busy-work: nothing we do seems good enough.*

In the mindset of white supremacy, human dignity is not inherent to every human being: it has to be earned and proven. The expression “white trash” gives an idea of how even within whiteness there is always a standard against which someone needs to prove themselves. If we can’t prove our superiority, we end up in the trash bin. No accomplishment is big enough: we are stuck in a never-ending race. In this race, the tasks we have to perform to demonstrate our own value take precedence over the people that we encounter along the way.

Therefore, we may bump into someone at the grocery store or bypass a bunch of people in line at the supermarket: we assume that the task takes precedence over a human being’s life. In that moment, we are so desperate to prove our value, that the completion of this task takes priority over anything and anyone else.

The eagerness to prove is a trap: a an unsatiable thirst.

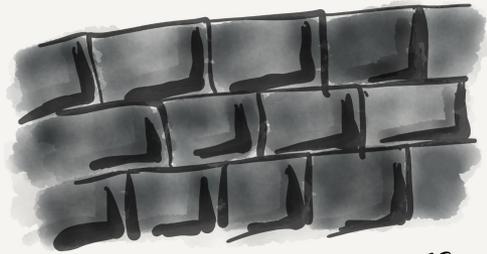
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*We cultivate our own freedom by learning to take care of ourselves and place our health and well-being before the many competing for your attention throughout the day.*

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# Safety Over Honesty



UNBLOCK THE STUCK PLACES



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*When we choose safety over honesty, we build a wall between ourselves and the world: we feel gradually more alone.*

When I analyzed the seeds of American institutions the first seed I saw was safety. In the illusion of “I over we” we tend to believe we are alone in the world and need to protect ourselves from everyone else. We live in fear because we can’t control anyone but ourselves. White supremacy would rather protect a false sense of safety, than run the risks that being honest requires. Honesty requires taking new pathways, having new conversations, and identifying new solutions. It requires we be transparent about our inner world. This is detrimental to our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with our organizations and communities.

When we are dishonest with ourselves, we live in fear and miss the opportunity to explore how life is when we are fully ourselves. We may have the car, the house, and the job, but life loses its flavor when we are not true to ourselves. Without honesty, relationships go sour: they become empty rituals without flair, surprise, magic, and eventually love. When we don’t experience being loved for exactly who we are, then relationships seem fragile—because they are tainted by the fear of being discovered.

We require dishonesty in our organizations when we ask leaders to always share good news but never their weaknesses, their mistakes, or their doubts. This eventually leads to burn out because it’s hard for leaders to keep the mask of certainty in the face of a world that is always more unpredictable and uncertain.

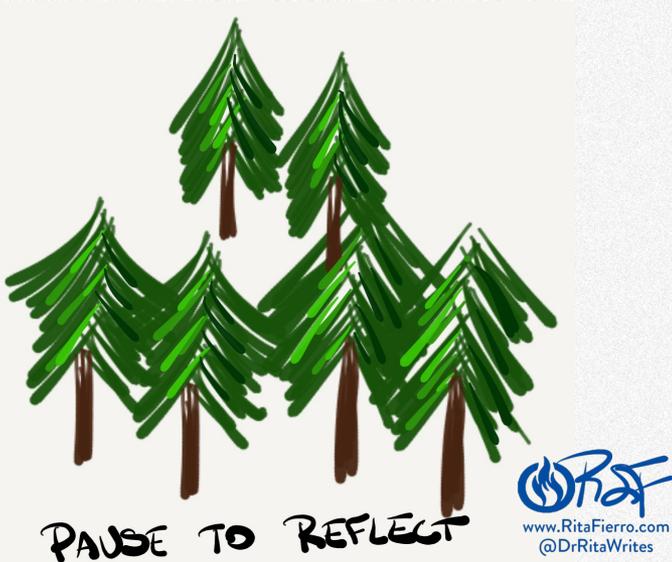
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*We cultivate our freedom by choosing to be increasingly honest with the people we love.*

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# Control Over Ambiguity



*When we choose control over ambiguity, everything is either sterile and predictable, or falls apart completely: life loses its magic.*

This the second seed of white supremacy planted in our systems is the seed of control. Control is the way we live in the illusion of being safe by limiting the discomfort that comes from others who we cannot control. In truth, we are safe when we are connected to our source. Life has a life of its own and no matter how much we try to stay in control life will have a way of disrupting our comfort zone to invite us to expand and grow.

In the *Cynefin* model of complexity theory, Snowden says that when we attempt to force complex things to be simple, we end up creating chaos because there is something about the complexity of life then when we attempt to control it acts like a pressure pot and escapes our control even more. It's much more productive to accept the ambiguity of life and attempt to make meaning of it while keeping a sense of detachment so that we can listen for new evidence, new insights, and new possibilities--reevaluating our old insights at each term turn. Respecting the complexity of life also allows more space for respecting other forms of life: animals, plants, planet.

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*We cultivate our freedom by learning to accept life, even when it doesn't go our way, and growing our trust in our own ability to face the uncertain, the unpredictable, even the unpleasant.*

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# Performance Over Authenticity



*When we choose performance over authenticity, our relationships get tense and fake: we feel like we lose our ability to just be ourselves.*

Safety over honesty and control over ambiguity, together, make for relationships where performance takes precedence over authenticity. As for safety without honesty, relationships based in performance create burnout because keeping a mask on is exhausting whether at work or in our personal life. Performance leaves us in a constant state of worry: Did I say the right thing? Do the right thing? Right/wrong is a trap in relationships, because there is no rule for right and wrong valid for all people at all times. Being authentic is sometimes learning to simply ask: "Have I offended you?" instead of questioning ourselves *ad nauseam*.

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*We cultivate our freedom by choosing authenticity over performance, as we grow our knowing of being enough exactly the way we are.*

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# Saviorism Over Equity



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*When we choose saviorism over equity, we consume ourselves: we feel powerless in midst of the pain of the world.*

When I analyzed the seeds of American institutions, the third seed I saw was saviorism. Saviorism was embedded in our systems predominantly by white women who established helping systems to prove our own value, before advocating for our own freedom. Because saviorism is designed to prove the value of the savior, it ignores the needs of the person being served. Saviorism also fails to create any long-term impact because, were the subject actually to be saved, the savior would lose their sense of purpose.

Saviorism is rooted in superiority: *I can help you because I know better than you.* Liberation instead, is grounded in the understanding that all human beings have limitations and we walk and work towards freedom, together. Equity requires us to stop competing for meeting our needs and stretch our minds instead for how all our needs can be met at the same time. Equity is creating the societal conditions that eliminate the need to save anyone because the needs of all are met. Equity means establishing a society that honors that all humans are equal in dignity.

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*We cultivate our freedom by choosing to accompany people who are experiencing challenges instead of trying to fix them or take their pain away. As we do so, people show up for us more as more people learn to accompany us on our journey too.*

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# Building Collective Power



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*When we build collective power—we build the communities that we want our world to be.*

This has led organizations to look for a way to fill the gap between long-form documents and presentations. What has emerged are slidedocs.

A slidedoc is a visual document intended to be read and referenced instead of projected. Slidedocs work for a variety of communication scenarios, from sales collateral to in-meeting reference material. And because of their modular nature, slidedocs can spread your smart thinking throughout your organization.

Effective slidedocs are developed by knowing your audience, understanding how they consume information, and by having one clear big idea. Developing effective slidedocs also requires visualizing ideas and making the information easy to navigate.

Slidedocs are one of the most effective tools for communicating ideas quickly and establishing consensus. Your ideas deserve the best possible communication vehicle. Slidedocs are designed for the way we communicate today.

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*We cultivate our freedom by investing in our communities and leveraging our collective power to be alive, nurtured, and thrive in community.*

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