



The Courage To Get Uncomfortable: Why It's So Difficult To Talk About Racism and Bias

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Annual CBCAP Meeting: Racing Forward

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Discomfort Alert!

“None of this is easy,
and we have to do it anyway”

-Michelle Cassandra Johnson, author of Skill in Action



Objectives

- Dissect the roots of and the tendency to avoid discomfort at all costs
- Introduce the concept of white supremacy culture, also called 'dominant culture'
- Discuss power and the different ways it shows up
- Demonstrate some ways that white supremacy culture can show up in our lives

What we're not going to be able to do:

- Cover everything we need to know and do to end racism



A recommended approach to get the most out of this session:

- Locate yourself in your position of power.
- Listen to your body and breathe into the discomfort.
- Listen to your ‘yeah, buts’ and ‘that’s not what I mean’ impulses, and use them as a cue to *LISTEN* to understand.
- Being wrong means you’re doing it right (and there are no prizes for being ‘right’).
- Be willing to do things differently and to experience discomfort.
- Embrace non closure.
- Live into the questions or hold the complexity/contradictions.

Adapted from Michelle Cassandra Johnson and Kerri Kelly, Race and Resilience

Check in:

- How many of you have felt uncomfortable during previous lectures or other conversations about race?
- Have ever been told that uncomfortable conversations are necessary?
- Have you ever thought about the origins of why it's so uncomfortable to feel uncomfortable?

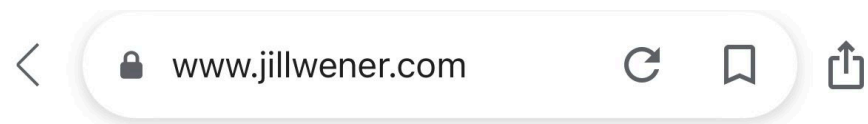


Jill Wener, MD, FACP

- Board-Certified Internal Medicine
- Conscious Health Meditation Instructor
- EFT/Tapping Practitioner
- Creator of CME-accredited *Meditation for Doctors: A Guide to the REST Technique*
- Owner of Conscious Health Meditation + Wellness
- CEO of Conscious Anti-Racism, LLC



How I Got Started/ I'm Part of the Problem



GOT STRESS? LEARN TO TEACH YOURSELF (AND OTHERS!) EFT/TAPPING AT JILL'S 'TRAIN THE TRAINER' FALL WORKSHOP! ×

WE'RE GOING TO BE OKAY. I MEAN IT.

Dear White Friends: Stop Saying Everything Is Going To Be Ok



“I’m not being defensive,
YOU’RE being defensive!”





ALLIES IN ACTION

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COMING SOON



The making of Conscious Anti-Racism

We provide practical tools that help people lean into the discomfort and understand the impact of racism, so they can contribute in a meaningful way to eradicating systemic oppression and inequality. We focus on increasing resilience and emotional intelligence around race, to equip our clients with the personal skills needed to recognize and address the insidious ways that racism shows up in their daily lives.



The difference between DEI and Conscious Anti-Racism

- DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion)
 - Recruiting and retaining diverse employees
 - Setting up or re-designing systems to create a more equitable work place
 - Bias training
 - Workplace culture
 - The 'how'



The difference between DEI and Conscious Anti-Racism

- Conscious Anti-Racism
 - The ‘what’ and the ‘why’ before the ‘how’ (and also some of the how)
 - Tools to deal with the fear (of discomfort)
 - A deeper understanding of systemic racism and bias and how they show up in our personal and professional lives- ‘in here’ vs ‘out there’ (and why that’s ok)
 - A deeper understanding of the lived impact of systemic racism and bias
 - Practical tools to lean into the discomfort, build resilience, and increase emotional intelligence around race
 - Communication skills – family, colleagues, speaking up as an ally
 - Removing the stigma about talking about race and bias





Let's pause for a breath

Let's start with an example (that actually happened):

- In a National Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training meeting for healthcare professionals
- Discussing the modules for that month which discussed whiteness
- “I’m not comfortable with the term ‘white culture’. I feel like it will lose a lot of white allies to the movement.”
- After a compassionate response from a facilitator: “What I meant was, I just don’t relate to that term. I don’t know what ‘white culture’ *is.*”



The example

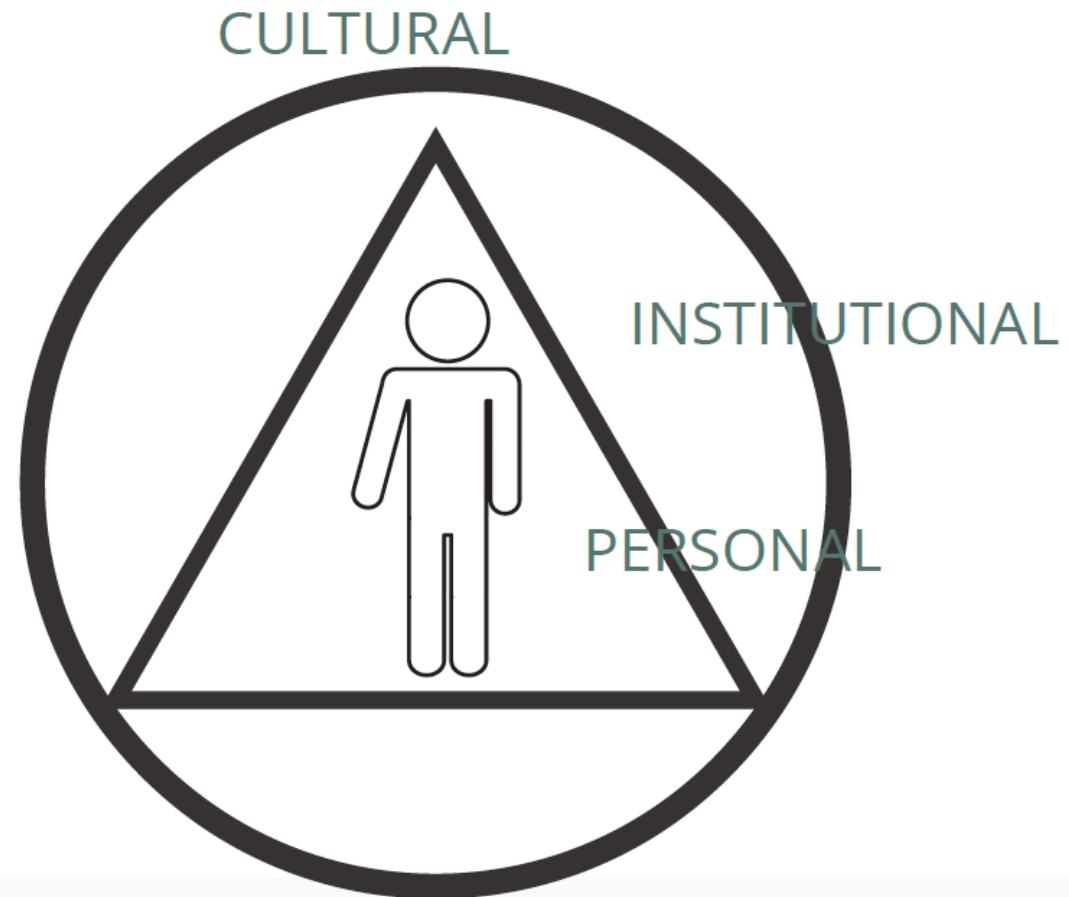
- Later in a small group breakout:
- “I’m not comfortable with the term white supremacy culture. I don’t feel like I identify with white supremacists.”



A pause to talk about power

- Who has power?
- Who determines what is 'normal'?
- Who determines who gets power?
- Who determines who stays in power?
- If you don't see the way the system is set up, does that mean it's not there? What else could it mean?
- If you don't realize that something is 'the norm', what could that mean?

How racism (and other 'isms') is happening on a personal, institutional and cultural level



From 'Race and Resilience' Workbook, Michelle C. Johnson and Kerri Kelly



Institutional Power

- Usually in hierarchies
- People at the top define the realities of everyone else
- Power plays out often in a harmful way



Cultural (social) power

- How a space functions, how institutions behave
- Control people and direct their behavior through access to resources, ability to influence, access to decision makers to get what they want
- Defines the reality for themselves and for others
- Culture is the norms, standards, values, narratives, access to power, beliefs of a group



Gatekeeping - Individual power

- The person in each system who controls access to the power
 - Parents, teachers, managers, leaders
- We are all IN these systems, we all gatekeep in some way
- The ability to make decisions that affect other people's lives
- Can be positive or negative
- How do each of us gatekeep in the spaces in which we move?





Let's pause for a breath

Back to the example.

Let's recap:

- 2 white people are not comfortable with some terminology that is widely used in DEI and anti-racism spaces (and think they therefore can determine that it should be avoided, aka gatekeeping)
- After listening to an explanation, the first person still feels the need to explain herself (and still misses the point)
- They both take issue with the term because they feel it doesn't apply to them (they are different)



We've talked about power.

We've talked about culture.

Who holds the power in this situation?

If these are the norms of behavior,
what is the culture?



What is white supremacy culture?

White Supremacy Culture

Culture reflects the beliefs, values, norms, and standards of a group, a community, a town, a state, a nation. **White supremacy culture** is the widespread ideology baked into the beliefs, values, norms, and standards of our groups (many if not most of them), our communities, our towns, our states, our nation, **teaching us both overtly and covertly that whiteness holds value, whiteness is value.** It teaches us that Blackness is not only valueless but also dangerous and threatening. It teaches us that Indigenous people and communities no longer exist, or if they do, they are to be exoticized and romanticized or culturally appropriated as we continue to violate treaties, land rights, and humanity. It teaches us that people south of the border are "illegal." It teaches us that Arabs are Muslim and that Muslim is "terrorist." It teaches us that people of Chinese and Japanese descent are both indistinguishable and threatening as the reason for Covid. It pits other races and racial groups against each other while always defining them as inferior to the white group.

White supremacy culture is reflected in the current realities of disproportionate and systemic **harm and violence** directed towards BIPOC people and communities in all aspects of our national life – health, education, employment, incarceration, policing, the law, the environment, immigration, agriculture, food, housing. We would not allow any of the ways in which our society prioritizes profit over people if we did not have dominant cultural beliefs that make normal what is deeply and alarmingly inhumane.

<http://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/characteristics.html> by Dr. Tema Okun

www.consciousantiracism.com



It's the air we breathe



Analogy adapted from Dr. Camara Jones

www.consciousantiracism.com



What white supremacy culture is NOT:

- KKK, confederate flag and white power rallies
- Fringe vs the fabric
- Intentional
- A personal attack



Who does white supremacy culture affect?

White Supremacy Culture Comes After All of Us

We are all swimming in the waters of white supremacy culture. We are all navigating this culture, regardless of our racial identity. We are not all affected in the same ways – some of us are

invited to participate at the cost of separating ourselves from our communities and families, some are shamed because we can never fully join no matter how hard we try, some are denied any invitation in order to be targeted or exploited or violated.


White supremacy culture is constantly encouraging all of us in all our racial identities to cooperate and collude. Because we all live in this white supremacy culture, these characteristics have the potential to show up in the attitudes and behaviors of all of us, particularly as we strive to survive and gain a foothold in institutions and fields that either overtly or covertly adopt white supremacy culture values.

White supremacy culture always operates to target Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities and individuals while in theory “benefitting” white communities and people. My current position is that this culture and its characteristics are toxic to all of us. They are damaging because they are self-perpetuating and promote white supremacy thinking and



What are the characteristics (symptoms) of white supremacy culture?

WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE HOME WHAT IS IT? ABOUT CHARACTERISTICS More + Search



DENIAL & DEFENSIVENESS
The habit of denying or
denying ways
in which white supremacy
and racism are produced
and our individual or
collective participation in
that production.

**RIGHT TO COMFORT &
FEAR OF CONFLICT**
we have a right to comfort,
which means we cannot
tolerate conflict, particularly
open conflict.

INDIVIDUALISM*
make it on our own, without
help, while pulling ourselves
up by our own bootstraps, is
a toxic denial of our essential
interdependence and the
reality that we are all in this,
literally, together.

<http://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/characteristics.html>

Sound familiar?
www.consciousantiracism.com



Let's go back to the example:

- not comfortable with some terminology that is widely used (and think they can determine that it should be avoided) = **right to comfort**
- still feels the need to explain herself = **defensiveness (aka “yeah, but...”)**
- they feel it doesn't apply to them (they are different)= **individualism**





Let's pause for a breath

What can we do? (a start...)

- Be willing to be uncomfortable
- Breathe into the discomfort
- Learn to recognize that discomfort as a sign that important change is occurring
- Recognize the symptoms of white supremacy culture and how they show up in our personal and professional lives- externalized and internalized
- Call them out when we see them- in ourselves and in other people and systems
- Continue to educate ourselves on how we might be unconsciously (or consciously) benefitting from and perpetuating the system



When not everyone wants to listen

- Do the work on your own
- Connect with your values and use them as a lens
- Create a culture of DEIJB
- Find (and know) your audience
- Anti-Racism is not a permanent label- dig deep and keep choosing it!

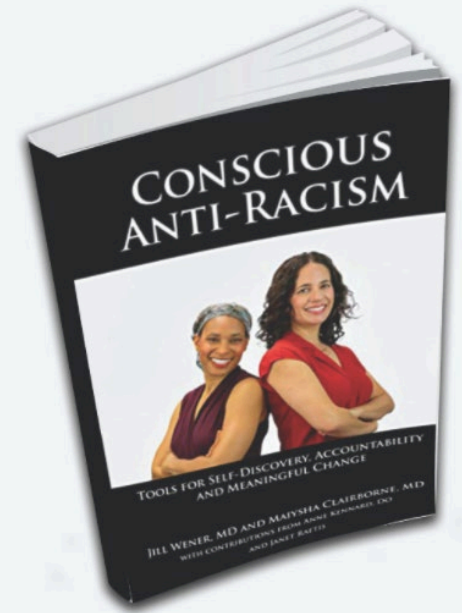


Resources

- **How To Be An Antiracist** by Ibram X. Kendi
- **Me and White Supremacy** by Layla Saad
- **Conscious Anti-Racism: Tools for Self-Discovery, Accountability, and Meaningful Change** by Dr. Jill Wener and Dr. Maiysha Clairborne
- **Conscious Anti-Racism** online course (SHRM accredited) or live/virtual trainings (www.consciousantiracism.com)
- **Showing Up For Racial Justice** www.surj.org
- **Dr. Tema Okun**
<http://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/characteristics.html>
- **Dying of Whiteness** by Jonathan Metzl
- **Anti-Racism Daily email series-** <https://www.antiracismdaily.com/>
- **Biased** by Dr. Jennifer Lynn Eberhardt

Conscious Anti-Racism Offerings

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Questions?

Thank you!



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