

OUT OF THE TOOLBOX

Manifestations of White Superiority

The manifestations of white superiority can be so subtle, but hugely impactful. Once seen, they can be changed. The ideas below originated with and are inspired by the lessons of the activist teachers Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones (a link to their workbook can be found in the resources). All of these are a result of our socialization into what I call our dominant culture of death, and thinking about these traits can offer insight into how white superiority has made us sick and harmed people who are not white. We live out these behaviors daily, believing that are natural.

OBJECTIVITY is praised over emotion, despite the fact that we are emotional beings, not linear machines. Our culture's chronic devaluing of our subjective, lived experiences invalidates ourselves and others.

PERFECTIONISM can lead to apathy and paralysis. It can prevent us from acting because of the fear that we're not good enough. It causes a lack of appreciation for others and low self-esteem as we believe that if we make a mistake, we are forever condemned.

SENSE OF URGENCY. This pervasive feeling makes us act without care as we override democracy and sacrifice the collective for individual actions. We take on more than we can do. We focus on *quantity*, not *quality*, valuing what we can measure or count as outcomes, rather than the process of creation and collaboration.

DEFENSIVENESS prevents us from being open to the perspective of others, leaving little room for growth and new ideas. We move toward *either/or thinking* and the dichotomies this creates—good/bad, right/wrong, us/them—centered on judgment instead of recognizing the and/both. We can be afraid to speak honestly. When we hide or lie, our shame and lack of integrity prevent our growth and the growth of others.

PATERNALISM fuels our entitlement to make decisions for other people, believing that we have the power, knowledge, and

right to do so. We tend to think we know better, leading us to arrogance.

WORSHIP OF THE WRITTEN WORD leads us to believe there is only one right way as we value data and documentation over lived experience. We privilege those who can write or use the dominant language, limiting acknowledgment of the variety of perspectives that actually exist.

POWER HOARDING is based on a scarcity mentality and greed. It is a powerfully destructive trait of our culture that fuels competition, entitlement, criticism, and fear of open conflict. We constrict instead of expand, leading to disconnection and distancing.

RIGHT TO COMFORT. I believe it is our right to comfort that leads white people to call the police when a person of color (seen as a threat) is in their neighborhood. It also leads to a sense of fragility and helplessness and causes people to get angry if another person is rocking the boat. We don't like when people raise up issues or problems; after all, we hold the belief that we can, and must, do everything ourselves. This destroys our ability to work cooperatively and propels competition to prove we are better.

INDIVIDUALISM makes it difficult to work with others, instead desiring attention, recognition, and credit. We can become unaccountable and isolated from the very people who can help us and keep us honest. We are social beings and we need one another to fulfill our potential. Individualism keeps us stuck and disconnected from the sense of belonging, a basic human need.

PROGRESS IS BIGGER, MORE, AND BETTER. This mentality leads to the destruction of our planet through greed—our misguided desire to have more and more. It is what underlies consumerism and materialism and has created an insatiable desire for things we actually do not need, as we march forever forward unto death. The desire for more explains why storage space is the most valuable real estate today. Growth and evolution are part of life, but change does not mean “more.” I like to remind myself that we already have everything we need!