

# Tackling Racism in Frontline Services

Understanding how racism and white supremacy show up in charity services.

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**CHARITY SO WHITE**

# Tackling Racism in Frontline Services

- What is race and what is racism?
- What is white supremacy and how does it show up in charities?
- How does racism and white supremacy show up in frontline services?
- What steps can leaders do to tackle racism?

Race as we know it is a product of  
colonial exploitation and violence

Whiteness was created as part of a political project to justify colonialism

Racial power dynamics operate  
differently around the world

But colonialism means that European  
ideals about racial power dynamics  
play out around the world

Whiteness is an exclusionary identity  
rooted in ideas of supremacy

**We exist in a world where racial  
power structures impact us daily**



We all play a role in upholding these  
systems of racial injustice

White privilege doesn't mean you do not struggle, but that those struggles do not stem from your race

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# White Supremacy Culture

- Paper and framework by Tema Okun looking at ways that white supremacy show up in the workplace
- Rooted in her experiences in Academia
- These characteristics help us understand the ways workplace culture is built on white and Western European values
- They are not bad things in and of themselves, but represent ways in which power functions in workplace

# White Supremacy Culture

**FEAR**

**ONE RIGHT  
WAY**

**EITHER /  
OR**

**MORE IS  
MORE**

**AVOID  
CONFLICT**

**WORSHIP OF  
THE WRITTEN  
WORD**

**DEFENSIVENESS**

**URGENCY**

**INDIVIDUALISM**

# White Supremacy Culture

## FEAR

- Culture of fear within the workplace that maintains existing power structures in place
- Staff afraid to speak up about experiences of racism they experience
- Environment where it is hard for staff to come together around similar experiences
- *“I have to put up with [racism] and carry on”*

# White Supremacy Culture

## ONE RIGHT WAY

- There is a right way to do things in the workplace
- Expect staff to do things in a certain way
- Punish staff that diverge from the set way of doing things
- Ideas around “culture fit” and what a team player looks like and acts like
- *Lack of diversity in leadership can mean assumption that racism doesn't happen and therefore no process for reporting incidents*

# White Supremacy Culture

**EITHER /  
OR**

- Framing things as binary choices
- Strips away the complexities of life and the world around us
- This or That
- Good or Bad
- Right or Wrong
- With us or Against us
- *Being able to look at racism or sexism, but not the nuances of both*



# White Supremacy Culture

**MORE IS  
MORE**

- Define success as doing more, achieving more, delivering more
- High workloads on teams mean less time to process and think
- Valuing quantity over quality
- Metrics focused on numbers and growth
- *Deliver more services to more clients, but not reflecting on the impact on staff*

# White Supremacy Culture

## AVOID CONFLICT

- Focusing on the emotional and psychological comfort of those with power
- Seeing conversations about racism or other forms of oppression as challenging that comfort
- Perceiving the victim as an aggressor or trouble makers
- *Managers trying to see both sides when mediating incidents of racism*

# White Supremacy Culture

## URGENCY

- Seeing everything as urgent
- Being in crisis mode all the time, jumping from dealing with one crisis to another
- High workloads that shift around crises
- Sense of urgency shapes decision making by prioritising expediency over complexity
- *“I have to focus on [current crisis] and ignore the racism I experienced”*

# White Supremacy Culture

## DEFENSIVENESS

- Those in power perceiving criticism and challenge as a threat against them
- Defensive responses - “I’m not racist”
- Denial as defensive tactic - “this didn’t happen”
- Speaking over or correcting those that experienced oppression - “that wasn’t racism”
- Seeing the victim of racism as the perpetrator and policing their actions or tone

# White Supremacy Culture

## INDIVIDUALISM

- Value individuality over community
- White people wanting to be seen as individual rather than part of white group - “*I’m not racist*” vs “*I benefit from racial power structures*”
- Not acknowledging how our experiences are shaped to our identities and communities
- Processes that focus on individual experiences and not wider patterns of injustice or power dynamics at play

# White Supremacy Culture

## WORSHIP OF THE WRITTEN WORD

- If it isn't written down it doesn't exist
- Prioritising written documents over discussion and collaboration
- Onus on the victims of racism to prove that racism occurred, and that proof has to be written
- Realities of power dynamics obscured - who can and can't speak up?
- *"We can't find proof that this person said this racist thing to you"*

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# Tackling Racism in Frontline Services



Accept and acknowledge that  
racism and systemic oppression  
exist within our society

**Listen to the experiences of  
racialised staff**

The burden of proof that racism  
occurred is not on the victims

Build processes that examine the  
ways that systemic racism could  
have affected the incident

Normalise having difficult  
conversations about racism and  
oppression in the workplace

Have regular conversations about  
how your services are upholding  
systems of racial oppression

**Build systems for reporting  
incidents of racism in a safe way**

Have conversations at a senior level on how to deal with incidents of racism from partners or clients



Trust is hard to build and easy to lose. Work to earn it and to keep it.

**What actions can you take to tackle racism in your services?**

# Questions and reflections