Organizational Culture Self and Staff Biases

- Utilize the strengths of differing life experiences to build inclusive communities and multicultural organizations.
- Consider how one’s biases impact leadership.
- Learn skills for addressing biases among organization staff.

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His record of School and University-wide administrative responsibilities include former director of strategic planning and quality assurance, associate dean for research, director of the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Fellowship Program in Policy and Evaluation, and advisory member of the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). His research specialization includes assessments of community issues and problems, organizational development, and program evaluation.

His recognition awards for distinction in program evaluation includes "Hide's Court" – a playground dedicated to children of addicted mothers in his name (Hill District Community Collaborative, 1998); and along with members of the Heinz Endowment, Highmark Health, and University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC), Dr. Yamatani has been presented with the “Community Builders’ Award” for his distinguished evaluation practice (Community Empowerment Association, Inc., 2014).

Dr. Yamatani has been a principal investigator for a multitude of selected funded grants and has recently published articles regarding issues of employing people with disabilities, violence reduction, conviction and recidivism, drug abuse trends, intervention paradigms, and programs for jail inmates, to name just a selection.

Assignment: Read the attached article and check list. In your journal (1) comment on one of the five ways mentioned in the article of how social workers can “promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients;”and (2) respond to the questions, Is there “white privilege” or any type of privilege for select people? What do you think of this author’s perspective?
5 Ways White Social Workers Can Respond to the Charlottesville Aftermath

2017/08/17
By Elspeth Slayter

In the past 48 hours, we have witnessed the President of the United States make statements that led many to believe that he equates neo-Nazi and White supremacist groups with left wing protest groups as equals. We have also witnessed the President seemingly defend neo-Nazi and White supremacist groups – and even suggest that “very fine people” participated in the “Unite the Right” rally at which racist and anti-Semitic slogans were widely chanted.

These statements have drawn widespread condemnation from both sides of the political spectrum. Yesterday, on Fox News’ Fox & Friends television show, Republican commentator Gianno Caldwell even notes that the President seemingly refuses to place blame on the White supremacists that initiated the rally. You can read a copy of the transcript of the press conference at which all this occurred here. To say that the President’s demeanor and words at that press conference are a disturbing development in our nation’s history would be an understatement. While expressions of racism and the reign of White supremacy writ large are nothing new in the United States, the events of the past week have indeed rocked our nation and our profession.

As social workers, our voices and actions in these times will speak volumes about how true we are to implementing the National Association of Social Workers’ Code of Ethics that guides our profession. When we become a social worker, we make a commitment to “promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients” in all situations. So, how, exactly, do social workers begin to do this work in these times? Here are five ways you can start to do this work.

First, we need to educate ourselves about the history of neo-Nazi and White supremacist actions in the United States. Knowledge is power. Moving beyond the idea that rallies such as last Saturdays’ are one-offs, or that there is nothing to be done with a world spiraling out of control is also vital for social workers. Start by learning about the prevalence of neo-Nazi and White supremacist groups in your very own state, a map of which can be found at the Southern Poverty Law Center. Social work faculty should check in with their colleagues and their students on how we can further educate ourselves.

Second, have a frank talk with yourself about how you or others may have benefitted from White supremacy (in the larger sense). “Owning” White privilege contributes to the social justice effort. To learn more about White privilege, consider this checklist and how the content relates to you.

While it may feel uncomfortable to realize just how much White people benefit from a larger system of White supremacy (even without being actively racist), this is a vital step in helping our society to shift. Doing this personal work will assist you in learning to center the voices of people who are oppressed in the journey to foster social justice. As author Roxane Gay points out in her book Bad Feminist, “when people wield the word ‘privilege,’ it tends to fall on deaf ears because we hear that word so damn much it has become white noise.” Don’t let the idea of addressing White privilege become white noise!
Third, take stock of your own thoughts about the events in Charlottesville and the President’s statements. Think about how you can advocate for social justice in response to all that has occurred. Standing up to oppression means stepping up in a time like this to speak out against hate and oppression.

While it can often be a losing battle to debate members of neo-Nazi and White supremacist groups directly, there are other ways to speak out. Let your community know where you stand – be that your family community, your work community, your geographic community or your social media community. Denounce oppression, but remember, you can also take a strengths-based approach and speak to what you think can contribute to peace and unity in our country.

Fourth, check in with your clients, especially, for example, your clients of color and/or those who are Jewish, in order to see how they have been impacted by the Charlottesville aftermath. As part of our professional social work education, we are taught that in order to truly understand our clients’ behavior, we have to think about their human behavior in the social environment. Given this, your acknowledgment of what is going on in your clients’ social environment can function as an engagement tool that can support your ultimate goals for intervention. Then, consider the ways in which you can partner with your clients to address social justice concerns germane to the case.

Fifth, if you’ve followed the first four steps, you are doing great. However, it’s also important to remember that we don’t want to become a fix-it-all person or a guilt-ridden person with a savior complex.

The idea is that White people exist in an environment that is insulated from race-based stress as a result of White privilege. In some situations, when White people are challenged by the realities of White supremacy, they may become sad, guilty, hostile, defensive or even fearful. People need to be aware of such reactions and must learn to manage them so that they don’t hinder the social justice efforts.

Social workers, you are primed to act in times like these! In fact, I argue that you are compelled to act, per the Code of Ethics. Remember, as Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel famously noted, “we must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim.”

The author would like to extend her sincere thanks to one of her accountability partners and colleagues, Dr. Shannon Butler Mokoro of Salem State University’s School of Social Work, for her consultation on this essay.