

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Perfectionism

- little appreciation expressed among people for the work that others are doing; appreciation that is expressed usually directed to those who get most of the credit anyway
- more common is to point out either how the person or work is inadequate
- or even more common, to talk to others about the inadequacies of a person or their work without ever talking directly to them
- mistakes are seen as personal, i.e. they reflect badly on the person making them as opposed to being seen for what they are – mistakes
- making a mistake is confused with being a mistake, doing wrong with being wrong
- little time, energy, or money put into reflection or identifying lessons learned that can improve practice, in other words little or no learning from mistakes
- tendency to identify what is wrong; little ability to identify, name, and appreciate what is right

Take Action on Perfection

- develop a culture of appreciation, where your girl scouts take time to make sure that everyone's work and efforts are appreciated
- develop a learning troop or group, where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning
- create an environment where your girl scouts can recognize that mistakes sometimes lead to positive results
- separate the person from the mistake
- when offering feedback, always speak to the things that went well before offering further feedback
- ask your girl scouts to offer specific suggestions for how to do things differently when offering feedback

Module Suggestion

1.2 Spotlight on Feedback

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Sense of Urgency

- continued sense of urgency that makes it difficult to take time to be inclusive, encourage democratic and/or thoughtful decision-making, to think long-term, to consider consequences
- frequently results in sacrificing potential allies for quick or highly visible results, for example sacrificing interests of communities of color in order to win victories for white people (seen as default or norm community)
- reinforced by funding proposals which promise too much work for too little money and by funders who expect too much for too little

Take Action on Sense of Urgency

- plan activities which allow plenty of time for your girl scouts to make girl-led choices about how they explore the activity and to reflect upon what they are learning
- understands that things take longer than anyone expects
- discuss and plan for what it means to set goals of inclusivity and diversity, particularly in terms of time
- learn from past experience how long things take
- be clear about how you will make good decisions in an atmosphere of urgency

Module Suggestion

2.5 Spotlight on Planning for Diverse Needs

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Defensiveness

- the organizational structure is set up and much energy spent trying to prevent abuse and protect power as it exists rather than to facilitate the best out of each person or to clarify
- who has power and how they are expected to use it
- because of either/or thinking (see below), criticism of those with power is viewed as threatening and inappropriate (or rude)
- people respond to new or challenging ideas with defensiveness, making it very difficult to raise these ideas
- a lot of energy in the organization is spent trying to make sure that people's feelings aren't getting hurt or working around defensive people
- the defensiveness of people in power creates an oppressive culture

Take Action on Defensiveness

- rotate leadership positions regularly so that all girl scouts practice leadership
- understand that structure cannot in and of itself facilitate or prevent abuse
- understand the link between defensiveness and fear (of losing power, losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege)
- work on your own defensiveness
- name defensiveness as a problem when it is one
- give people credit for being able to handle more than you think
- discuss the ways in which defensiveness or resistance to new ideas gets in the way of the mission
- value all ideas equally to encourage everyone to participate in problem solving and brainstorming.
- avoid giving your personal opinion allowing your girl scouts decide as a group and work cooperatively

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Quantity Over Quality

- all resources of organization are directed toward producing measurable goals
- things that can be measured are more highly valued than things that cannot, for example numbers of people attending a meeting, newsletter circulation, money spent are valued more than quality of relationships, democratic decision-making, ability to constructively deal with conflict
- little or no value attached to process
- if it can't be measured, it has no value
- discomfort with emotion and feelings
- no understanding that when there is a conflict between content (the agenda of the meeting) and process (people's need to be heard or engaged), process will prevail (for example, you may get through the agenda, but if you haven't paid attention to people's need to be heard, the decisions made at the meeting are undermined and/or disregarded)

Take Action on Quantity over Quality

- include process or quality goals in your planning
- make sure your group of girl scouts have a group agreement which expresses the ways in which you want to work together
- make sure this is a living document and that you are using it in your activities
- look for ways to measure process goals (for example if you have a goal of inclusivity, think about ways you can measure whether or not you have achieved that goal)
- learn to recognize those times when you need to adjust your schedule or step away from an activity in order to address people's underlying concerns

Module Suggestion

4.4 Spotlight on Goal Setting

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Worship of the Written Word

- if it's not in a memo, it doesn't exist
- the organization does not take into account or value other ways in which information gets shared
- those with strong documentation and writing skills are more highly valued, even in organizations where ability to relate to others is key to the mission

Take Action on Worship of the Written Word

- embrace Learning by Doing and have your girl scouts experience hands-on learning whenever possible
- offer an assortment of different ways for your girl scouts to express themselves, through actions, songs, art pieces or other means in addition to the written word
- work to recognize the contributions and skills that every person brings to the troop or group (for example, the ability to build relationships)

Module Suggestion

4.1 Spotlight on Being Hands-On

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Only One Right Way

- the belief there is one right way to do things and once people are introduced to the right way, they will see the light and adopt it
- when they do not adapt or change, then something is wrong with them (the other, those not changing), not with us (those who know the right way)
- similar to the missionary who does not see value in the culture of other communities, sees only value in their beliefs about what is good

Take Action on Only One Right Way

- accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal
- once the girl scouts have made a decision about which way will be taken, honor that decision and see what you and the girl scouts will learn from taking that way, even and especially if it is not the way you would have chosen
- work on developing the ability to notice when others do things differently and how those different ways might improve your approach
- look for the tendency for your girl scouts as a group or individually to keep pushing the same point over and over out of a belief that there is only one right way and then name it
- when working with communities from a different culture than yours, be clear that you have some learning to do about the communities' ways of doing
- never assume that you or your girl scouts know what's best for the community in isolation from meaningful relationships with that community

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Paternalism

- decision-making is clear to those with power and unclear to those without it
- those with power think they are capable of making decisions for and in the interests of those without power
- those with power often don't think it is important or necessary to understand the viewpoint or experience of those for whom they are making decisions
- those without power understand they do not have it and understand who does
- those without power do not really know how decisions get made and who makes what decisions, and yet they are completely familiar with the impact of those decisions on them

Take Action on Paternalism

- make sure that everyone knows and understands what girl-led means for your program level
- make sure everyone knows and understands their level of responsibility and authority
- when you must make decisions for your girl scouts (for example by overruling them if they have chosen an unsafe way to do something) make sure they understand the reasoning you used to reach your decision

Module Suggestion

3.0 Spotlight on Girl-Led

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Either/Or Thinking

- things are either/or, good/bad, right/wrong, with us/against us
- closely linked to perfectionism in making it difficult to learn from mistakes or accommodate conflict
- no sense that things can be both/and
- results in trying to simplify complex things, for example believing that poverty is simply a result of lack of education
- creates conflict and increases sense of urgency, as people are felt they have to make decisions to do either this or that, with no time or encouragement to consider alternatives, particularly those which may require more time or resources

Take Action on Either/Or Thinking

- notice when your girl scouts use either/or language and push them to come up with more than two alternatives
- notice when your girl scouts are simplifying complex issues, particularly when the stakes seem high or an urgent decision needs to be made
- slow it down and encourage a deeper analysis
- when your girl scouts are faced with an urgent decision, take a break and give them some breathing room to think creatively
- avoid making decisions under extreme pressure

Module Suggestion

3.0 Spotlight on Making Decisions

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Power Hoarding

- little, if any, value around sharing power
- power seen as limited, only so much to go around
- those with power feel threatened when anyone suggests changes in how things should be done in the organization, feel suggestions for change are a reflection on their leadership
- those with power don't see themselves as hoarding power or as feeling threatened
- those with power assume they have the best interests of the organization at heart and assume those wanting change are ill-informed (stupid), emotional, inexperienced

Take Action on Power Hoarding

- include power sharing in your Group Agreement
- discuss what good leadership looks like and make sure your girl scouts understand that a good leader develops the power and skills of others
- understand that change is inevitable and challenges to your leadership can be healthy and productive
- understand that you will become less of a leader and more of an advisor as your girl scouts grow

Module Suggestion

3.5 Spotlight on Being Girl Led

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Fear of Open Conflict

- people in power are scared of conflict and try to ignore it or run from it
- when someone raises an issue that causes discomfort, the response is to blame the person for raising the issue rather than to look at the issue which is actually causing the problem
- emphasis on being polite
- equating the raising of difficult issues with being impolite, rude, or out of line

Take Action on Fear of Open Conflict

- role play ways to handle conflict before conflict happens
- distinguish between being polite and raising hard issues
- don't require those who raise hard issues to raise them in acceptable ways, especially if you are using the ways in which issues are raised as an excuse not to address the issues being raised
- once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity to revisit it and see how it might have been handled differently

Module Suggestion

1.3 Spotlight on Conflict Resolution

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Individualism

- little experience or comfort working as part of a team
- people in organization believe they are responsible for solving problems alone
- accountability, if any, goes up and down, not sideways to peers or to those the organization is set up to serve
- desire for individual recognition and credit
- leads to isolation
- competition more highly valued than cooperation and where cooperation is valued, little time or resources devoted to developing skills in how to cooperate
- little or no ability to delegate work to others

Take Action on Individualism

- build cooperative learning opportunities into your activities
- ask your girl scouts to reflect on their ability to delegate to others
- ask your girl scouts to reflect on their ability to work as part of a team to accomplish shared goals

Module Suggestion

1.1 Spotlight on Small Groups

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Progress is Bigger, More

- observed in systems of accountability and ways we determine success
- progress is an organization which expands (adds staff, adds projects) or develops the ability to serve more people (regardless of how well they are serving them)
- gives no value, not even negative value, to its cost, for example, increased accountability to funders as the budget grows, ways in which those we serve may be exploited, excluded, or under served as we focus on how many we are serving instead of quality of service or values created by the ways in which we serve

Take Action on Progress is Bigger/More

- determine with your girl scouts the criteria for success for the activity when planning, and who will make the determination
- when making choices, includes all the costs, not just the financial ones, for example the cost in morale, the cost in credibility, the cost in the use of resources in your girl scouts' cost/benefit analysis
- include process goals in your planning, for example make sure that your girl scouts' goals speak to how they want to reach their goals, not just what they want to do

Module Suggestion

3.0 Spotlight on Girl Led

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Objectivity

- the belief that there is such a thing as being objective
- the belief that emotions are inherently destructive, irrational, and should not play a role in decision-making or group process
- invalidating people who show emotion
- requiring people to think in a linear fashion and ignoring or invalidating those who think in other ways
- impatience with any thinking that does not appear logical to those with power

Take Action on Objectivity

- realize that everybody has a world view and that everybody's world view affects the way they understand things
- realize this means you too
- push yourself to sit with discomfort when people are expressing themselves in ways which are not familiar to you
- assume that everybody has a valid point and your job is to understand what that point is

Module Suggestion

2.3 Spotlight on Exploring Diversity

Characteristics of White Dominant Culture And Take Action Items

Right to Comfort

- the belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort (another aspect of valuing logic over emotion)
- scapegoating those who cause discomfort
- equating individual acts of unfairness against white people with systemic racism which daily targets people of color

Take Action on Right to Comfort

- understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning
- welcome it as much as you can
- deepen your political analysis of racism and oppression so you have a strong understanding of how your personal experience and feelings fit into a larger picture
- don't take everything personally

Module Suggestion

2.1 Spotlight on Cultural Competence

Adapted from <https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html>