

A decorative pattern of red circles, some solid and some hollow, arranged in a grid-like fashion at the top of the cover.

EMERALD POINTS

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**DISMANTLING  
WHITE  
SUPREMACY IN  
COUNSELING**

**JASON D. BROWN**

A decorative pattern of red triangles, some pointing up and some pointing down, arranged in a grid-like fashion at the bottom of the cover.

DISMANTLING WHITE  
SUPREMACY IN COUNSELING



# DISMANTLING WHITE SUPREMACY IN COUNSELING

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*“To Kobe, Jenna, Kaylee, and Shelley”*



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## PREFACE

The concept of Whiteness has always been tied to notions of superiority. Therein lies the risk of talking about it, much less writing a book about it, speaking of it in our professions, with clients, research, and community work. Each time we do, we breathe life into a concept that has only served to divide and arrange human beings for the benefit of one group over all others.

I was at a conference this past year where the topic of White privilege was discussed. I was asked, as a White guy, to offer my perspective on this in a mixed-race group with some people I knew, but most I did not. My fear tells me I was not sure of my answer. I know it was the best one I had at that moment, but I am not satisfied with it. I recall saying something like “I am increasingly aware of how I am seen as a White person by others and need to look at myself in the mirror and own it”.

I need to take responsibility and action to confront White supremacy. This book is a step in that direction, and not a conclusion. What I know and do will shift as I learn more about myself and confront uncomfortable truths about my race and personal identity.

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# INTRODUCTION

For some, “White supremacy” can conjure up disturbing images. However, for readers of this book, I hope to conjure up images of a client lying on a couch while their counselor writes in a notebook.

Consider some conventions, like the 50-minute hour. Typical in contemporary training and practice, the 50-minute hour is sacred in psychoanalysis, but even Freud did not consistently follow the custom ([Kottler & Balkin, 2020](#)). The 50-minute counseling hour is a European import. This convention is followed because it is customary.

By looking at how norms and standards of Whiteness underlie Eurocentric conventions in counseling, we can recognize how assumptions made in our profession persist. Base assumptions rooted in White supremacy can be visible if we look critically, and the best chance of making our work relevant and effective lies in recognizing and challenging those assumptions. It is a moral responsibility for White professionals in training and practice to recognize how the assumptions are embedded in the social, economic, and political contexts within which we work. In this book, I look at how White supremacy benefits White people and disadvantages Indigenous, Black, and People of Color (IBPOC), and some possible ways that we might make progressive changes in practice and the counseling professions.

Now, back to the couch image. This image is easy to conjure when considering counseling because of its association with Freud. But why him? Moreover, why are many “classic” counseling theorists in our introductory textbooks on counseling White men and, to a lesser extent, White women? It is not a coincidence. This same noncoincidence underlies the persistent gaps and racial disparities in education, economics, health, justice, and the environment.

This book was written at a time when public support for negative populist and right-wing leadership was reflected in explicit and divisive political rhetoric in both American and Canadian mainstream politics. These increasingly polarizing times have left a majority of adults in the United States believing that civil war is a possibility in the next several years ([Statistica, 2024](#)). In Canada, security services are doubled for politicians dealing with increasing threats of political violence ([Leblanc, 2024](#)). Counselors who understand the historical, ideological, and

sociopolitical nature of White supremacy are better positioned to challenge fear and misinformation in ourselves and clients. We can also contribute to progressive changes in professional scholarship and participate in social action to dismantle White supremacy.

I am aware that writing and publishing this book is predicated on my own White privilege. The opportunity to work in the academy, receive a positive reception to the idea by a publisher and now, have the book in print, are rooted in this privilege. In addition, this book is a snapshot in time reflecting my current awareness and learning. I am in the process of recognizing and challenging White supremacy in my personal life and profession. I know that my understanding is rudimentary and I strongly encourage those interested to consult the many outstanding professional and scholarly contributions by IBPOC authors.

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- Statista. (2024). Share of American adults who think there is a possibility of a civil war in the next few years in the United States in 2022. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1326688/public-opinion-possibility-civil-war/>. Accessed on March 21, 2024.

# WHY WOULD A WHITE GUY WRITE A(NOTHER) BOOK ABOUT WHITE THERAPISTS AND THEIR CLIENTS?

We have all read plenty of books about psychology and counseling by White people about White people. Most are written from a “neutral” and “objective” (aka White) perspective. So why would a White guy write another counseling book about White people? Don’t we have enough of those already? Yes, we do.

What I hope to do differently is examine White supremacy from a critical perspective and identify ways counselors can work to dismantle it. I am aware that even with the best of intentions in writing this book, it breathes life into racialization and White supremacy, which are destructive ideas with devastating consequences. I also need to be clear that as a White person, I will always be limited in my awareness and understanding of Whiteness and White supremacy, but I know that White supremacy affects how I show up and practice my profession. My intent is to move forward recognizing that I am a 'work in progress' seeking a better understanding and approach to practice counseling in ways that are antiracist and decolonizing.

## IS THIS BOOK FOR YOU?

During my training, I learned about stages of change (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). The idea is that each of us approaches change with different awareness and motivation levels. In pre-contemplation, the person does not recognize that a problem exists or feels that there are more downsides than upsides to change, so they make no plans to make a change. In contemplation, there is a recognition of a problem and plans to make a change. In preparation, people are taking small steps to change and feel that it is worthwhile to do so. In action, one is actively changing and intends to continue to do so.

This book is for counselors and counselors in training who recognize that White supremacy is a structural problem, that it is more than individual behavior, that avoidance or denial is complicity, and that the harm to IBPOC far outweighs any harm from racism to White people. If you are in contemplation or preparation, this book is for you.

#### A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE

We are all racialized people. As such, I capitalize Indigenous, Black, People of Color, and White throughout this book.

I capitalize Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, and Metis to show respect for the identities, governments, institutions, and collective rights that colonial governments have attempted to erase in Canada and the United States. I recognize that part of reconciliation is recognizing and respecting these terms.

I capitalize Black when referring to people of African descent in the United States and Canada to recognize both the rich history and racial identity. I know that renaming and reclaiming language have played significant roles in fighting for racial equality. I also recognize that in 1889, American sociologist W.E.B. Dubois advocated against using a lowercase “n” when writing “Negro,” stating, “Eight million Americans deserve a capital letter.”

I capitalize People of Color when referring to people who identify as Brown, Latinx, and Asian, recognizing the wide diversity of people included under this umbrella but shared experiences dealing with structural oppression.

I use the acronym IBPOC (rather than BIPOC, an acronym originating in the United States in 2010 for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) with “First Peoples First” because of the unique history and context of colonization, displacement, and cultural genocide that Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States have experienced.

I also capitalize White when referring to people in Canada and the United States who identify with European ancestry. I believe that not capitalizing “White” leaves room for Whiteness to be invisible, which is a big part of the problem.

## WHAT IS WHITE SUPREMACY?

This chapter explores how White supremacy is embedded in counseling preparation, training, and practice norms, as well as professional structures legislated through laws and legal systems legitimized by government structures and policies. The opening vignette underscores how racialized violence has been represented as individual behavior, and often attributed to poor mental health. Public discourse about White supremacy has drawn attention to its pervasive nature for some, recognition of its harmful effects on communities. White people benefit from White supremacy through structural advantages and societal privileges. Dismantling White supremacy benefits everyone.

### VIGNETTE

On June 6, 2021, a White man killed four members of the same family who were out for an evening walk in London, Ontario. The victims arrived from Pakistan 14 years prior and included Salman Afzal, 46; his wife Madiha, 44; their daughter Yumna, 15; and a 74-year-old grandmother whose name was withheld. They identified the hospitalized boy as Fayeze. They were targeted because of their Islamic faith (Dubinski, 2024).

In an unrelated incident, almost 2 years later to the day on June 2, 2023, a 35-year-old Black mother of four was fatally shot by her White neighbor in Ocala, Florida. Ajike “AJ” Owens was knocking on her neighbor’s door at the time, wanting to talk about her neighbor, who admitted to hurling racial slurs at her children who were playing in their yard (Hutchinson & Zaru, 2024).

We see examples weekly, if not daily, in our inbox and news feeds of violent and explicitly racist acts. Some White people condemn such acts because they would

“never do anything like that” and, therefore, cannot be racist. The problem with that view is White supremacy is structural, and individual actions reflect the systems that keep the status quo if we focus only on individual behavior. It is also much more comfortable for White people to view racism as the conduct of a person who is sick or unwell. The media is fond of portraying such incidents as those of a “lone wolf” motivated by mental health problems (New York Times, 2022).

What do you think? Does mental illness account for racial violence?

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## PUBLIC DISCOURSE ABOUT WHITE SUPREMACY

During the 1920s and 1930s, the *New York Times* published an article titled “White Supremacy Menaced,” which presented a Harvard professor’s concern about protecting the White race from being overwhelmed by other races (Baird, 2021). After World War II, White supremacy was rejected in public discourse because of the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime and the need to combat race hatred (Bleich, 2011). The civil rights era brought progressive changes to policies prohibiting racial discrimination.

In the 1980s and 1990s, “White supremacy” continued to be viewed as a rare and isolated case of interpersonal or group activities. The notion of “reverse racism” appeared in a backlash against affirmative action practices from the civil rights era (Norton & Sommers, 2011).

However, in the 1980s and 1990s, Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Cheryl Harris, and Richard Delgado began writing about critical race theory. As Delgado and Stefanic described in 2011,

*The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up. However, it places them in a broader perspective, including economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious. Unlike traditional civil rights, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality*

*theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law. (p. 3)*

Scholars have described the 2000s as an era of “structural racism,” “symbolic racism,” or “racism without racists” (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Indigenous, Black, and People of Color (IBPOC) intellectuals and activists continued to develop a critical understanding of Whiteness as a tool of social domination. White supremacy is viewed more comfortably as individual actions that express extreme racially motivated hostility (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). This is particularly important now due to increased attention to the subject of race in public life that creates tension for White people who are unaccustomed to having a race.

### Personal Consequences of White Supremacy

In 2020, Amy Harmon’s article titled “How Much Racism Do You Face Every Day?” was published in the *New York Times*. The article discusses a study published in the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* by English et al. (2020) titled “Daily Multidimensional Racial Discrimination Among Black U.S. American Adolescents.” The study includes statements derived from their research, and some of them are included here. As you read a small sampling of the statements below, consider that the 101 participants averaged over five per day across six subscales of individual general, vicarious general, individual online, vicarious online, individual teasing, and vicarious teasing:

- How often did people say untrue things about people in your race/ethnic group online?
- How many times did you hear about a family member experiencing something they described as racial discrimination?
- How many times did a peer joke about the negative treatment of Black people in the United States? (e.g., enslavement, police brutality)
- How often did a peer tease you because of your skin tone?
- How often were you watched closely or followed by security guards or clerks at a store or mall because of your race/ethnicity?
- How many times did you encounter people who were surprised that you, given your race or ethnic background, did something well?
- How many times did a peer point out that you fit a stereotype of your race/ethnicity?

## The Invisible Backpack

In a now-famous essay, Peggy McIntosh (1995) pointed out that she learned about racism as the actions of one person and not structures that promote and sustain it. She observed a recurring reluctance among men to acknowledge their overprivilege despite recognizing the disadvantages faced by women. While they expressed a commitment to improving the status of women in society, academia, or the curriculum, they often resisted the idea of reducing their privileges (McIntosh, 1995). This denial created a taboo around the advantages men derive from the disadvantages faced by women, shielding male privilege from full acknowledgment, reduction, or elimination.

Macintosh also recognized White privilege. Similar to male privilege, White privilege was also protected and denied (McIntosh, 1995). Similarly, racism is recognized for its disadvantages but not its advantages, which are embedded in White privilege. Macintosh observed that White privilege consists of advantages that White people are born into and are oblivious to. It resembles a set of tools that accompany us into every situation and, without effort, act as “maps,” “passports,” and “blank checks” (McIntosh, 1995).

A partial list follows:

- (1) I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
- (2) I can go shopping alone most of the time and am assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
- (3) I can turn on the television or open the paper’s front page and see people of my race widely represented.
- (4) When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
- (5) I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
- (6) If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on White privilege.
- (7) I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, and into a hairdresser’s shop and find someone who can cut my hair.