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POV Capstone

April 2021

Diversification is not Enough: Dismantling White Supremacy in the Nonprofit Sector

Question: How do we enhance diversity efforts to further dismantle white supremacy in the non-profit sector?

I. Introduction

Elizabeth Jarvie[1] is a twenty-six-year-old, petite blond woman. She joined a committee at work drafting guidelines to help the company establish its internal culture. During the committee meeting, a company leader said to put in writing language that would help further define 'who we are.' Elizabeth sat patiently, waiting for her colleagues to begin discussing topics such as their fear of open conflict, sense of urgency, perfectionism, and 'only one right way' thinking. After ten minutes of this anticipated discussion, she politely suggested that everyone review the worksheet created by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun that lists the facets of white supremacy culture and unpacks ways they show up in the workplace. Elizabeth did this because she recognized that her whiteness would keep her from being viewed as aggressive, and she would not be at risk for losing her job for playing the 'race' card. Elizabeth stepped into her power and risked disapproval and defensiveness from her white colleagues. If not addressed, she knew they would leave the meeting having built a company culture around white supremacist norms and

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[1] Elizabeth Jarvie and Jodi-Ann Burey, "In a World Full of Karens, Be an Elizabeth," interview by Jenna Hanchard, *Lola's Ink,* July 5, 2020. https://anchor.fm/jenna-hanchard/episodes/In-a-World-Full-of-Karens-be-an-Elizabeth-eg9ffh

characteristics, given their limited white lived experiences. This culture would inevitably be used to discriminate against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color at the company moving forward.

Podcast Host Jenna Hanchard, one of the only Black women in the company culture meeting, discussed the significance of Elizabeth's contribution on episode two of her podcast Lola's Ink. She reflected with another Black colleague, Jodi-Ann Burey, about the meaning of allyship. According to Burey, Elizabeth showed that she was willing to risk disapproval from white colleagues "to execute on something in alignment with her values."[2] Elizabeth did not "just try to be [Hanchard's] friend."[3] Both Hanchard and Burey consider Elizabeth a rarity because in their experiences, many white women in the workplace are indifferent if not oblivious to the discrimination faced by of Black women and other colleagues of color. Burey believes this is because white women are trying desperately to access the patriarchy, while she, Hanchard, and other Black women are trying to "blow it up."[4]

In the last few decades, 'diversity,' 'equity,' and 'inclusion' have become buzzwords in the non-profit sector. Many organizations claim to see the importance of including diverse perspectives, yet they only hire a small percentage of employees from underrepresented backgrounds. Edgar Villanueva, a social justice philanthropist, motivational speaker, and author of the book *Decolonizing Wealth,* believes that "diversity is how white people talk about race when they don't want to talk about race."[5] Hiring a few token employees of color and paying consulting firms to hold diversity trainings is not enough to create a workplace culture where everyone in the organization is respected and able to speak their minds. This is not enough to

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[2] Burey, interview.
[3] Hanchard, interview.
[4] Burey, interview.
[5] Edgar Villanueva, *Decolonizing Wealth,* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2018), 52.

bring about the social change non-profits seek in their mission statements. Token minorities frequently end up burdened by the feeling that they are representing their entire race, and that all their behaviors will reflect on other Latinos or Blacks or Asian Americans or Native Americans.[6] Many are afraid to speak truth to their white bosses or colleagues because there could be negative consequences for them, not only in that moment but into the foreseeable future.[7] Organizations do not embody 'diversity,' 'equity,' or 'inclusion' when they are steeped in white supremacy culture, as Elizabeth pointed out. Creating a work environment that is just for all requires white people to become aware of the various issues contributing to this reality. White people must step into power and work alongside Black, Indigenous and People of Color to dismantle white supremacy.

II. Literature Review – Problems with Diversification

The term white supremacy connotes extremist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan for many Americans, but white supremacist norms and characteristics are often salient much closer to home. Merriam Webster defines white supremacy as "the social, economic, and political systems that collectively enable white people to maintain power over people of other races."[8] For example, the colleagues that would likely ostracize a Black woman for bringing up the ideas Elizabeth shared in the company culture meeting are acting under the social control of white supremacy. Non-profits claiming that 'diversity' is valued but refusing to hire more than a few token employees of color is white supremacy. Many modern companies and organizations,

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[6] Villanueva, 53.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Merriam Webster, "White Supremacy," Accessed 25 February 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/white%20supremacy

including "do-good" non-profit and social service organizations, are structured to internally replicate white supremacy. This organizational design determines fundamental elements like how power is held and by whom, who makes decisions and how decisions are carried out, what the relationship of the organization is to monetary resources, and what constitutes success, effectiveness, purpose, etc.[9] Strict hierarchies of authority are enforced, usually with white, heterosexual, well-compensated men on boards, in executive positions, or otherwise at the top.[10] An organizational structure built around white supremacy is not conducive to true 'diversity,' 'equity,' and 'inclusion,' even if the organization does hire a few token people of color. Dismantling the white supremacist organizational structure should be the true goal of all non-profit organizations. To do so they must deeply reckon with the salience of *tokenism*, *silencing*, *performativity*, *perfectionism*, and *white saviorism* embedded in their organizational culture.

Tokenism

Because white supremacy primarily functions in our society as an invisible cultural norm, organizations often unconsciously reinforce this problematic structure, making it difficult or impossible to open the door to other cultural norms and standards. This is how employees of color are tokenized. Unfortunately, many organizations say they want to be multicultural, but really, *they only allow other people and cultures to come in if they adapt or conform to the already existing white supremacist cultural norms governing the organization.*[11] *This means that token employees of color may be given seats at the table, but the decision-making power and*

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[9] Villaneuva, 43.
[10] Villanueva, 45.
[11] Ibid.

resources to implement change remain in the hands of predominantly white leaders. A lot of people of color seek out social impact careers in the non-profit sector because they truly care about purpose; their goal is to connect the organization's services to people from their own communities.[12] But being forced to leave a part of yourself behind in order to assimilate to an organization's white supremacist cultural norms can impede this goal. Furthermore, even if token employees of color do practice "code-switching" or other forms of assimilation, sometimes they still are not taken seriously by their white colleagues and superiors.

A common way the predominantly white leadership in non-profit organizations conveys its doubt in BIPOC employees' ability and credibility is best exemplified in the following anecdote, an interview between Villanueva and a Black colleague working in fundraising:

> "We had to hire a consulting firm in the last six months to do a full scan of the field, just to bring it back to my boss and to his boss to say everything I've been saying for the last year. Literally the report is verbatim all of the stuff that I had brought up, but no one heard it, or it wasn't given the same weight without having some sort of outside external person who was paid a lot of money to say it and put it nice and neatly down on paper. That's the game we're forced to play."[13]

Discrediting people of colors' ideas and experiences can lead to silencing and even resignation, more salient issues impeding the deconstruction of white supremacist organizational norms and true 'diversity,' 'equity,' and 'inclusion.' White leaders in non-profit organizations often discredit the input of people of color by hiring consultants to research the very issues that people of color have intimate knowledge of from lived experiences or time spent working with

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[12] Villanueva, 49.
[13] Villanueva, 55

communities on the ground.[14] The Association of Black Foundation Executives summarized in a 2014 report called ''The Exit Interview'' that many Black professionals left this field specifically because they felt extra scrutinized and that their experience was not trusted.[15]

Silencing

The discrediting of already tokenized employees of color is a component of epistemic violence. Kristie Dotson, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Michigan, notes that epistemic violence refers to the way white people operating under the system of white supremacy damage Black, Indigenous, and People of Color's ability to speak and be heard.[16] Any speaker in a linguistic exchange has a relationship based on dependency with their audience.[17] When there is reciprocity in this relationship, reciprocity entails that the audience understands the speaker's words and understands what the speaker is trying to communicate with the words.[18] *Epistemic violence is the refusal, intentional or unintentional, of an audience to communicatively reciprocate a linguistic exchange. An example of this is white colleagues attempting to be 'inclusive' by listening to the ideas of colleagues of color, but not trusting their ideas.* Dotson notes that this lack of trust is usually unconscious and because of cultural ignorance.[19] White supremacist organizational structures in the workplace, as noted in the workbook made by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, embody epistemic violence through paternalism. Okun writes,

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[14] Villanueva, 55

[15] *AFBE,* "The Exit Interview, Perceptions on Why Black Professionals Leave Grantmaking Institutions," 2014, Accessed February 10, 2021. https://www.abfe.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ABFE-The-Exit-Interview.pdf

[16] Dotson, Kristie. "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing." Hypatia 26, no. 2 (2011): 236–257.

[17] Forscher, Patrick S., Calvin K. Lai, et. al., "A Meta-analysis of Procedures to Change Implicit Measures," PsyArXiv. August 15, 2016. doi:10.1037/pspa0000160.

[18] Dotson, 241.

[19] Dotson, 238.

"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."[20] Those for whom they are making decisions can refer to those in the communities the non-profit is serving, or those with less power in the workplace, especially women and people of color who may come from those very communities. Prejudice can insert itself into linguistic exchanges in many ways, but the main point of entry is via internalized stereotypes and biases that affect people's ability to extend credibility to members of historically disenfranchised groups.

Other types of epistemic violence include testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. In Miranda Fricker's book *Epistemic Injustice*, she notes that testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word.[21] This harms the victim primarily by denying her the capacity to be a knower, a capacity central to human value. Testimonial injustice also harms its victim by confining her to a low place on the social hierarchy, undermining her ability to speak her mind and participate in conversations.[22] Hermeneutical injustice refers to a resulting sense of powerlessness that keeps members of an oppressed group from being able to generate conceptual resources for understanding their social experience.[23] This can cause symptoms of stress, as it forces its victims to have to accept the unjust status quo. Testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice are both issues faced by the 'diverse' employees at non-profits. Organizations often hire young model minorities who are the first to 'make it' in their families, but until white supremacy and the resulting epistemic violence it produces are dismantled, they will likely remain token others. Villanueva notes from

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[20] Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones, "White Supremacy Culture," *DR Works,* dismantlingracism.org, http://www.dismantlingracism.org/uploads/4/3/5/7/43579015/whitesupcul13.pdf
[21] Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.
[22] Martin Kusch, "Review: Miranda Fricker: Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing," *Mind* 118, no. 469 (2009): 171.
[23] Fricker, 1.

experience that "having a seat at the table is not the same as feeling free to speak in your own voice, to offer your own divergent ideas, to bring your full self to bear on the work."[24]

Many organizations are actively trying to disrupt the effects of epistemic violence, testimonial injustice, and hermeneutical injustice. Typically, they do this through diversity trainings. The prevalence of unwanted behaviors across many areas of human life, such as race discrimination in the workplace, suggests that mental processes outside of one's conscious awareness or control influence behavior.[25] It is well known that the non-profit sector has spent an incredible amount of money on making 'diversity,' 'equity,' and 'inclusion' the subject of conference topics, task forces, summits, surveys, reports, and trainings.[26] The ultimate goal of all of this is to disrupt implicit bias and change automatically retrieved associations to ultimately change behavior.[27] But it turns out that while people are easily taught in these trainings to respond correctly to a questionnaire about bias, they soon forget the 'right' answers.[28] The positive effects of diversity trainings rarely last beyond a day or two, and a number of studies suggest that these trainings can even activate bias or spark a backlash.[29] To some extent, diversity trainings allow people to deny racism.[30] Diversity trainings can cause white people to feel removed or absolved from the work of actually redistributing power in their organization's structure. Discussing implicit bias with the main goal of improving scores on an 'after'

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[24] Villanueva, 57.

[25] Forscher and Lai, "A Meta-analysis of Procedures to Change Implicit Measures."

[26] Villanueva, 59.

[27] Forscher and Lai, "A Meta-analysis of Procedures to Change Implicit Measures."

[28] Frank Dobin and Alexandra Kalev, "Why Diversity Programs Fail," *Harvard Business Review,* 2016, https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail

[29] Elizabeth Levy Paluck and Donald P. Green, "Prejudice Reduction: What Works? A Review and Assessment of Research and Practice," *Annual Review of Psychology,* 2009. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163607 http://static1.squarespace.com/static/5186d08fe4b065e39b45b91e/t/51e3234ce4b0c8784c9e4aae/1373840204345/Paluck_Green_AnnRev_2009.pdf

[30] Villanueva*,* 52.

questionnaire lets white people ignore persistent, alarming racial inequalities and discriminatory policies and practices. This is performativity, another important element of white supremacy embedded in organizational structure.

Performativity

Performativity is a significant hurdle to achieving the true 'equity' and 'inclusion' a 'diverse' non-profit workplace requires. Vu Le, blogger at NonProfitAF.com, author, and co-founder of the Community Centric Fundraising movement, frequently calls on his counterparts to examine the equity and inclusion practices in their organizations. Le believes there is a difference between true 'equity' and performative "fakequity." *"Fakequity," like performativity, is when an organization spends so much time hosting inclusivity trainings and letting others know that they are thinking about equity, that they think it is enough to just do tha*t.[31] This is a problem because dismantling white supremacy requires more than just hosting diversity trainings to examine its damaging effects and acknowledge unfair ways in which power is consolidated among mostly white people. To create a company culture in which white supremacy is thoroughly disrupted, white people working at non-profit organizations must step back and play a supporting role, giving credibility and decision-making power to employees of color. Organizational goals and priorities must be centered on the wants and needs of the communities the organization serves, as articulated by employees from these communities and the

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[31] Vu Le, "Are You Guilty of Fakequity?" *Nonprofitaf.com,* October 15, 2017, https://nonprofitaf.com/2015/03/are-you-guilty-of-fakequity-if-so-what-to-do-about-it/

communities themselves. True 'equity' and 'inclusion' of 'diverse' colleagues of color is imperative to disrupting performativity and reorganizing power structures in organizations.

Perfectionism

We will all benefit from dismantling the toxic structures of white supremacy. White supremacy does not harm white people as much as it harms Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, but it is still damaging. Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones created a list of the damaging characteristics of white supremacy culture that show up in our organizations.[32] White supremacy culture is powerful because it is omnipresent, and therefore difficult to name or identify.[33] Because we all live in a society steeped in white supremacy culture, these characteristics tend to show up in the attitudes and behaviors of everyone, including people of color. Therefore, these attitudes and behaviors can show up in any organization or workplace, whether it is white-led and predominantly white or BIPOC-led and predominantly people of color. *Most of these characteristics fall under the umbrella of perfectionism, the "tendency to identify what's wrong, paired with little ability to identify, name, and appreciate what's right."[34] Problematic characteristics resulting from this perfectionism include a sense of urgency, defensiveness, an unfair preference of quantity over quality, paternalism, and a fear of open conflict.[35]*

These characteristics cause harm for everyone because they are used as norms and standards to scrutinize people's behavior. When these characteristics combine in the workplace, a perfect storm is created. Things that can be measured are more highly valued than things that

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[32] Okun and Jones, "White Supremacy Culture."
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Villanueva, 45.

cannot, and this is unfair because it prioritizes numbers of people attending a meeting, newsletter circulation, and money spent more than quality of relationships, democratic decision-making, and ability to constructively deal with conflict.[36] During my internship with a white-led, all-white non-profit Community Action Agency in 2019, I observed these white supremacy culture characteristics at play. Okun and Jones note that another key element of perfectionism is "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."[37] This is damaging because I saw that my non-profit organization literally could not function without the work put in by all its employees, and the company culture that uplifted a select few and devalued the rest was very dehumanizing. The sense of urgency resulting from this perfectionism had the propensity to, like Okun and Jones noted, "make it difficult to take time to be inclusive, to encourage democratic and/or thoughtful decision-making, to think long-term, to consider consequences."[38] Employees at my non-profit, like those at most non-profits, were so pressed to deal with the problems at hand that they lacked the time and energy to thoughtfully plan courses of action that would diminish some of this stress. I got the sense that some employees seemed to welcome if not rely on this daily stress, using it as an excuse to keep from critically examining the company culture and embarking on the difficult task of making it more democratic and inclusive. Perfectionism and the resulting white supremacy culture characteristics clearly detract from the mission of the social impact work most non-profits seek to accomplish, and organizations must devalue perfectionism in order to deconstruct their white supremacist organizational structures.

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[36] Okun and Jones
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

White Saviorism

White saviorism is yet another salient characteristic of many non-profit workplaces, as it occurs frequently when white people attempt to use their power and resources to "save" a community they believe to be struggling. White saviorism often causes a damage narrative to be forced onto the community, and it minimizes the community's agency. It is a complex espoused (often unconsciously) by many white employees and leaders, and it creates damaging power imbalances between white people and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. White-led organizations and social justice groups claiming to work on behalf of the oppressed and people of color often rely on their existing and potential relationships with wealthy white donors to sustain their organizations and social movements.[39] This presents a conflict of interest, as true equality and justice is not likely to be achieved by organizations massaging the privilege guilt of wealthy white people. Many organizations spend lots of valuable time securing cozy relationships with major donors instead of organizing to dismantle the very systems of oppression that facilitated the accumulation of wealth by these donors and their contemporaries.[40] This provides a true danger for radical movements championed by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color because it can cause them to become misdirected and eventually co-opted by the agendas of white leaders in non-profit organizations who have access to wealthy white donors and other resources global capitalism deems more valuable than real social change. Some argue that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color's fight for reparations must occur

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[39] Tiffany Lethabo King and Ewuare Osayande, "The Filth on Philanthropy: Progressive Philanthropy's Agenda to Misdirect Social Justice Movements," INCITE: *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, (Duke University Press, 2007,) 82.
[40] King and Osayande, 85.

outside of the predominantly white-led non-profit sector, largely for these reasons. White saviorism revolves around using the money wealthy white families amassed by centuries of oppressing BIPOC to fund organizations allegedly seeking to "save" these communities. With this complex so deeply embedded in the white leadership making up organizations' structures, it is difficult for white employees to work with colleagues of color to truly bring about social change.

Dismantling structural white supremacy to bring about true 'diversity,' 'equity,' and 'inclusion' in non-profit organizations requires a collaboration between white people and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., begins his speech "Where Do We Go from Here," by emphasizing that "power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change."[41] Because of structural white supremacy, white people must acknowledge and admit that we have power. We have a responsibility to use this power to "bring about social, political, and economic change," by actively stepping into our power to dismantle the system of white supremacy in the workplace. We have a responsibility to talk about white supremacy, to call it out and implement alternative solutions when we find ourselves perpetuating tokenism, silencing, performativity, perfectionism, and white saviorism. We must acknowledge our role in perpetuating this structure and collaborate with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to dismantle it. According to Dr. King, "Love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems," so we must appreciate and embrace our shared humanity.[42] White supremacy can

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[41] Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "Where Do We Go From Here," (1967), *Umich.edu,* http://www-personal.umich.edu/~gmarkus/MLK_WhereDoWeGo.pdf
[42] King, "Where Do We Go From Here."

only be dismantled if we act out of love for one another. This love can take many forms, many of which can be implemented in the workplace.

III. Methodology

I am using a synthetic literature review to answer my research question, "How do we enhance diversity efforts to further dismantle white supremacy in the non-profit sector?" Because of the time constraint of the limited research period, I have chosen to listen to pre-recorded interviews with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color working in the non-profit sector instead of interviewing them myself. The beginning steps of identifying the problems with diversification I completed by listening to a variety of casual conversations between various nonprofit leaders, including Vu Le, author of the blog *Nonprofitaf.com*; Michelle Shireen Muri, host of the Podcast *The Ethical Rainmaker*; Joan Garry, creator of the online *Nonprofit Leadership Lab*; and Edgar Villanueva, author of the book *Decolonizing Wealth* and founder of the Liberated Capital Fund. I encountered most of these resources through simple google searches about nonprofit leadership, or by searching "nonprofit" in the podcast app on my phone. Almost all of the nonprofit leaders of color whose media I'm analyzing are either collaborators, colleagues, or close friends, despite the fact that they live on opposite sides of the country.

After identifying the multifaceted issues presented by these industry professionals, I had an important discussion with my professor and second reader. He pointed me in the direction of several books and JSTOR articles written by philosophers, namely those by a Black woman philosopher named Kristie Dotson.[43] I further analyzed and unpacked the systemic racial issues

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[43] Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," 243.

that undergird the frustrating daily microaggressions and the discrediting that nonprofit leaders of color experience. I will used my analysis to find the biggest themes in this body of knowledge and apply these themes to the situations presented in the podcasts I listen to and blog posts I read. In addition to reviewing the more scholarly sources suggested to me by my professor, I carefully analyzed the relevant cited sources Edgar Villanueva used to frame his argument about the problems with diversification in *Decolonizing Wealth.* I also reviewed the essays written by nonprofit professionals of color in the essay collection, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded,* as many of these essays serve to both identify the problems I'm seeking to unpack in direct, practical, non-theoretical terms, and propose implementable solutions based on the industry experience of the authors.

I have made a conscious effort, since my project is centered on problems with diversity in the nonprofit sector, to ensure that the majority of my sources are either written or endorsed by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. These are the authors, scholars, and industry professionals who have the most lived experience navigating the systems of oppression in our society, so their insights will predominantly guide my research and shape the solutions I propose in my analysis and conclusion.

An obvious limitation is that I am biased because I am a white woman. This bias could cause me to either internally gaslight or discredit the experiences, ideas, and theories I am reading about, or it could cause me to wholly extend my trust to every opinion or theory presented in a work written by a person of color with lived experiences and an outlook on life that I do not share. Another limitation is that I have very limited experience working in the non-

profit sector myself, and the experience I do have was as an intern in rural Pennsylvania where the staff of my organization was entirely, one-hundred percent white. At that time, I had not done research on white supremacy culture in the workplace, so any analysis of my experiences will have the bias of hindsight and the bias of not entirely accurate recollection. Because of the demographics of my organization, I have never really experienced the context that I am studying firsthand, so it is likely that this lack of life experience will cause me to be more trusting and inclined to almost unconsciously be less critical in my analysis of the scholarship in my research.

Despite these limitations, I have chosen a synthetic literature review as my form of methodology instead of analyzing data because I believe in the work that scholars and non-profit sector professionals are doing to reflect on their experiences in the workplace. Reviewing these podcasts, books, and scholarly articles ensures that I am answering my research question qualitatively. This methodology leaves more room for exploring the nuances in experience and thought, and it is conducive to embracing the idea that broad generalizations about the experiences and beliefs of people of color cannot be conclusively drawn, no matter how many questions are in a survey or how large a dataset is. Dismantling white supremacist structures and improving diversity efforts in the nonprofit sector require different approaches in different settings and workplaces, so analyzing a variety of literature written by scholars and non-profit sector professionals of color is best for understanding the complexity of the diversification problem and for proposing potential solutions.

IV. Analysis — Solutions

Dismantling structural white supremacy in non-profit organizations requires more than just a careful analysis of the damaging effects of tokenism, silencing, performativity, perfectionism, and white saviorism in an organization's culture. It requires an examination of the very practices that perpetuate these facets of white supremacy, and an intentional destruction of the habits, mindsets, and rules that perpetuate these practices. Even in our supposedly democratic American society, struggles over resources and power motivate efforts to exclude many affected people from the decision-making process.[44] Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are the ones most excluded and exploited from the social, political, and economic system of white supremacy, so they possess the perspective and wisdom needed to fix it. To survive the trauma of this exclusion and exploitation, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color have always understood that the dominant white supremacist worldview was only one option, even when it seemed inevitable. This, Villanueva believes, has made them masters of alternative possibilities.[45] White people in non-profit organizations must extend power to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by validating their lived experiences and by allowing their ideas to shape policy both within non-profit organizations and in the communities they serve. This is the ultimate goal of 'diversity.'

Tokenization

Disrupting tokenization will be a process, but it is possible. In an interview with Joan Garry on her *Non-profits Are Messy* podcast, blogger Vu Le listed several tangible solutions organizations can implement to work towards eliminating tokenization in non-profit

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[44] Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 53.
[45] Villanueva, 63.

workspaces.[46] Le reflected on his time as the Executive Director of Rainer Valley Corps, a Seattle-based non-profit organization with the mission of "promoting social justice by cultivating leaders of color, strengthening organizations led by communities of color, and fostering collaboration between diverse communities.[47] The central problem of tokenization revolves around employees of color feeling forced hide parts of themselves and assimilate to white standards in the workplace. Le believes this can be disrupted if white leaders in non-profit organizations actively create a new company culture that rejects white supremacist structures in favor of embracing the unique ideas and characteristics employees of color bring. For example, Le urges *hiring committees to be less stringent about weeding out people based on petty details such as typos or grammatical issues on resumes.*[48] For some non-profit leaders of color, including Le, English is a second language, so perfectionistic standards must be avoided in order to meaningfully engage with the contributions of those coming from underrepresented communities. Additionally, Le suggests that *white leaders be proactive in reorganizing priorities and de-centering capitalist tropes like productivity and efficiency from company culture*. He notes that organizations should *remove arbitrary time constraints and instead center staff and board meetings around storytelling, sharing of food, and other forms of bonding. This is central to making employees of color feel comfortable, valued, and non-tokenized, because it incentivizes honest conversations and structural flexibility, leading to true inclusion.*

[46] Vu Le, "Non-profits Are Messy and Funny: My Interview with Vu Le," Interview by Joan Garry. *Non-profits Are Messy,* March 7, 2016. Audio. https://blog.joangarry.com/ep-4-diversity-leadership-humor-interview-vu-le-nonprofit-with-balls-podcast/
[47] "RVC Mission and Values," *Rainer Valley Corps,* 2020. https://rvcseattle.org/mission/
[48] Le, interview.

Silencing

Another important step in fundamentally changing non-profit organizational structure is extending credibility and decision-making power to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. According to CEO of the non-profit organization Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality (RISE) Diahann Billings-Burford, change is not always received well due to the nature of how white leaders deal with the prospect of institutional change.[49] Burford notes in an interview with Joan Garry on episode 91 of the podcast *Non-profits Are Messy* that being taken seriously by white colleagues as a non-profit leader of color is a challenge. Specifically, the challenge is assessing what needs to be said to articulate the truth and figuring out how to say it in a way that white leaders will actually receive and consider it. Burford has frequently found herself wondering, "what can't I say, because it will lead to my exit."[50] This work of concentrating on how to perfectly articulate issues relating to racial injustice in order to be effectively received by white people should not fall solely on people of color. *White employees and leaders in non-profit workspaces must actively listen and show that they are listening by actually implementing the changes BIPOC leaders suggest. This paves the way for more honest, open dialogue from colleagues of color in the future*. Burford provides a crucial method of measuring the effectiveness of this kind of implementation, asserting that *predominantly white people in power must begin to make decisions that feel uncomfortable or even against their own self-interest if they truly want to empower people of color* in the communities they serve and even in their own organizations.

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[49] Diahann Billings-Burford, "The Diversity Problem in Our Sector." Interview by Joan Garry. *Non-profits Are Messy,* August 24, 2019. Audio. https://blog.joangarry.com/ep-91-the-diversity-problem-in-our-sector/
[50] Billings-Burford, interview.

Performativity

While listening to Black, Indigenous, and People of color and using their ideas to shape

policy is extremely valuable to destructing white supremacy in non-profit organizations, it is

equally crucial that white leaders and colleagues do not performatively use people of color or

practice testimonial smothering. Kristie Dotson defines the testimonial smothering that occurs

among members of oppressed groups as the truncating of one's own testimony in order to ensure

that the testimony contains only content for which one's audience demonstrates testimonial

competence.[51] Vu Le discussed the effects of testimonial smothering in practical terms during his

keynote speech at the Network for Strong Communities' Momentum Conference in Austin,

Texas in February, 2020.[52] The central theme of Le's speech is that non-profit leaders of color

are beyond tired of being asked repeatedly by their white clients and co-workers to share their

perspectives and opinions like they are speaking for their entire race. Especially, Le noted, when

these white clients and co-workers usually neither follow up nor actually implement the change

suggested by Le and other leaders of color.[53] Additionally, Le believes that it is unfair for non-

profit leaders of color to be emailed and asked for uncompensated advice or consultation,

especially when providing such services requires them to do the intense work Dotson said

requires "truncating their own testimonies" to ensure that what they're saying will be received by

white people.[54] At the conference in Austin, Le comically warned his fellow non-profit leaders

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[51] Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," 249.
[52] Le, Vu, "Vu Le - Equity, Inclusion, and Collective Impact," Collective Impact Forum, February 20, 2020, https://collective-impact-forum.simplecast.com/episodes/vu-le-equity-inclusion-and-collective-impact-O_2vcK1A
[53] Le, "Vu Le - Equity, Inclusion, and Collective Impact."
[54] Dotson, 241.

of color to be on the lookout, because "if you're ever alone in a dark alley at night and you see somebody approaching you, they're probably going to try to invite you to a DEI summit."[55]

A serious solution to the issue of performativity in the non-profit sector can be reached by compensating people of color for their advice and consultations. Native American activist Madonna Thunder Hawk writes in her essay in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded,* that "foundations will often expect organizations to be very specialized and won't fund work that is outside their funding priorities."[56] This reality, she warns, can "limit an organization's ability to be creative and flexible as things change in our society."[57] Things are changing in our society, and this is evidenced by the fact that Vu Le and other leaders of color are becoming burdened with well-meaning white people who genuinely do want to listen to the perspectives and ideas of people of color. But these perspectives are valuable, and people of color must be compensated for their role in consulting and advocating for structural change in our organizations and communities. *Foundations and non-profit organizations must be flexible, as Madonna Thunder Hawk encourages, and they must ensure that compensating people of color for their intellectual property is prioritized.* Hilary Pennington, Executive Vice President of Programs at the Ford Foundation, spoke on February 19, 2021 about what white leaders in non-profit and philanthropy spaces can do to affect change in this regard during Edgar Villanueva's panel, #Philanthropysowhite – What Is the Role of White Leaders in Philanthropy in Dismantling White Supremacy.[58] According to Pennington, *foundations and other grantmaking institutions must re-evaluate the criteria necessary for their grantmaking. Requiring grantees to be*

[55] Le, "Vu Le - Equity, Inclusion, and Collective Impact."
[56] Madonna Thunder Hawk, "Native Organizing Before the Non-profit Industrial Complex," *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded,* INCITE! (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007), 106.
[57] Thunder Hawk, "Native Organizing Before the Non-profit Industrial Complex," 105.
[58] Hilary Pennington, "#PhilanthropySoWhite 2021," *Decolonizing Wealth Project,* Webinar. Streamed live February 19, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29YBL-6udc0

formalized non-profit 501(c)3 organizations limits foundations' capacity to distribute money to people of color activists on the ground who work as speakers and community organizers seeking restorative justice.

Perfectionism

In addition to re-prioritizing grantmaking and funding practices to challenge the existing performative and disrespectful way leaders of color's time is treated, it is imperative that non-profit organizations and foundations also disrupt the salience of perfectionism in their organizational structure. Perfectionism often comes into play in both non-profit organizations and foundations, as grant makers frequently require specific and incredibly time-consuming components to grant applications. In an interview with Michelle Shireen Muri on her podcast *The Ethical Rainmaker,* Vu Le and his colleague Anna Rebecca Lopez discuss the damaging effects of requiring logic models and other rigid forms of proving success to grant makers in order to secure funding.[59] Instead of spending time they could be using to implement programs and transform communities, these perfectionistic standards require non-profit leaders to spend hours agonizing over, in Le's eyes, irrelevant specifics.[60] Worship of the written word is another element of white supremacy culture from Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun's document, and it also falls under the umbrella of perfectionism.[61] *Antidotes suggested by Jones and Okun include "taking the time to analyze how people inside and outside the organization get and share*

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[59] Le, Vu and Anna Rebecca Lopez, "Episode 9: Decolonizing Data." Interview by Michelle Shireen Muri, *The Ethical Rainmaker,* November 18, 2020, https://www.theethicalrainmaker.com/listen-now/episode-9-decolonizing-data-with-anna-rebecca-lopez-vu-le
[60] Le, interview.
[61] Okun, "White Supremacy Culture."

information; figuring out which things need to be written down and coming up with alternative ways to document what is happening; and working to recognize the contributions and skills that every person brings to the organization."[62] Michelle Shireen Muri, a private non-profit fundraising consultant and host of *The Ethical Rainmaker* suggests that *non-profit leaders and their donors, board members, and program officers at foundations should prioritize investing in interpersonal relationships.*[63] According to Le, "we should just get coffee instead of writing another formal-ass report."[64] Deprioritizing perfectionism, especially in the form of white supremacist grantmaking and funding structures, is essential to creating successful diversity efforts in the workplace. Moving away from the worship of the written word allows for more time for co-workers of all backgrounds to collaborate creatively and flexibly, spending more time in communities bringing about change.

White Saviorism

In order for true collaboration to be successful, white saviorism must be addressed and dismantled within the non-profit sector. Community building requires unity between white people and people of color, and this unity must be based on mutual appreciation and an understanding of inherent value shared by all human beings. There is a difference between acting out of love and acting out of condescending sympathy or to repress guilt. *In order to effectively dismantle white savior complexes, at times it is required for white leaders to proactively step down from positions of power in order to uplift leaders of color.* In Edgar Villanueva's

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[62] Okun, "White Supremacy Culture."
[63] Muri, interview.
[64] Le, interview.

#Philanthropysowhite panel, President and CEO of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation Nick Donahue discussed his decision to step down.[65] The mission of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation is to "champion efforts that prioritize community goals that challenge racial inequities and advance excellent, student-centered public education for all New England youth."[66] Donahue believes that "Living into the values we have come to embrace as an organization means it is time for me to help the Foundation find a new leader whose experience and expertise will support the organization's new work even more fully moving forward."[67] Donahue further states in his letter of resignation that "Deep reflection and learning about who I am, my place in the world, what I have come to understand and what I now believe, led me in part to this decision."[68] Essentially, Donahue is acknowledging his position of privilege, while simultaneously recognizing that an important next step towards using the Nellie Mae Education Foundation to achieve racial justice in the education system involves uplifting leaders of color whose perspectives more authentically represent the experiences of children of color in the public school system. Now is the time for white leaders like Donahue to set a positive example for their peers by making space in their organizational structure to empower historically marginalized voices and give Black, Indigenous, and People of Color positions with decision-making power. This is how white supremacy and the resulting white saviorism are dismantled in organizational structures.

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[65] Nick Donahue, "#PhilanthropySoWhite 2021," *Decolonizing Wealth Project,* Webinar. Streamed live February 19, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29YBL-6udc0

[66] "About: Advancing Racial Equality in Public Education," *Nellie Mae Education Foundation,* 2021, https://www.nmefoundation.org/about/

[67] Nick Donahue, "Announcing My Transition," *Nellie Mae Education Foundation,* February 5, 2021, https://medium.com/nellie-mae-education-foundation/nick-donohue-announces-plans-to-step-down-as-president-ceo-of-the-nellie-mae-education-foundation-254e6db685c3

[68] Donahue, "Announcing My Transition."

V. Conclusion

There is no one way to dismantle white supremacy culture and the resulting tokenism, silencing, performativity, perfectionism, and white saviorism. Donahue's decision to step down was crucial to the success of his specific organization, but allyship and the amplification of voices of color can take many forms. Elizabeth Jarvie began to tackle white supremacy culture in an entirely different way after her contribution to the company culture committee meeting. Instead of stepping down from her position, Elizabeth expanded her role to include a new pro-bono service to people of color in her workplace and those she connected with through social media. My Karen Translator is a social media based online service "for BIPOC who have better things to do than deal with 'Karen.'"[69] Though the term Karen has become very nuanced and widely shared on social media, an official definition according to Urban Dictionary is "a pejorative term used in the United States and other English-speaking countries for a white woman perceived as entitled and uses her privilege to demand her own way at the expense of others."[70] There are many Karens in nonprofit organizations, so the mission of My Karen Translator is to "give visibility and affirmation to the spectrum of racist experiences BIPOC face in a system of white supremacy." Black, Indigenous, and People of Color can submit a form describing the microaggression they experienced to MyKarenTranslator.com, where Elizabeth and a team of antiracist allies will review it and respond to the Karen explaining why her action was wrong. This takes the burdens of time, energy, awkwardness, and responsibility off people of color.

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[69] "About." *MyKarenTranslator,* http://mykarentranslator.com/about/
[70] "Karen." *Urban Dictionary,* https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Karen

Dismantling white supremacy to truly support and empower people of color clearly can take many forms. One of the purposes of examining the characteristics of white supremacy culture is to point out how organizations which unconsciously use these characteristics as their norms and standards make it difficult, if not impossible, to open the door to other cultural norms and standards. Every white person must assess the salience of tokenism, silencing, performativity, perfectionism, and white saviorism in their organization and select which form of allyship is most necessary and effective for them. A critical component of allyship is understanding and respecting the reality that people of color are not monolithic. Like every white person, each person of color has views and ideas shaped on their own individual set of lived experiences. Another, if not the most, critical component of allyship involves white people embracing a willingness to be uncomfortable. According to Jones and Okun, being able to identify and name the cultural norms and standards you want to embrace is a first step to making room for a truly multi-cultural organization.[71] This identification of ideal cultural norms and standards must come from intentionality and active listening on behalf of white leaders in positions of power, and a willingness to meaningfully reckon with the messiness created by centuries of colonization and dehumanization is imperative. It is time for white people to work with Black, Indigenous and People of Color to dismantle white supremacy in the nonprofit sector and in our society. It is time for white people to listen and act accordingly.

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[71] Jones and Okun, "White Supremacy Culture."

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