

Introduction to White Identity Formation for Youth

Video and Discussion Guide

How to Use This Workshop

This video and discussion comprise a one-hour workshop, designed for a group of Unitarian Universalist (UU) youth who self-identify as white. Participants view an [animated video](#) (11:54), then unpack the concepts and explore personal connections to the information it presents. The video introduces four stages of ethnic identity formation that people who identify as white may experience. The workshop addresses how being perceived by others as members of the dominant culture helps to shape a white identity.

A presenter of this material can be of any racial/ethnic identity. However, it is essential that they be comfortable with their own racial/ethnic identity. The ideal facilitator has done some explicit work examining racial/ethnic identity issues in society and within themselves. Facilitators should fill out the Cummings Identity Map ([Handout 3](#)), view the video, and ask themselves the discussion questions, before leading the workshop.

It is important that the presenter of this material not assume potential participants identify as white. A group that appears to be all white may include youth who have multiple racial/ethnic identities; these youth may consider themselves white, of color, or both white and of color—or this may be their first opportunity to name and claim a racial/ethnic identity. Also, a group may include white youth who have never before thought about their white identity. If you only have a single meeting, before you show the video, make sure the hour to follow will be welcoming and useful to all who are in the room. Gather the group and introduce the workshop with words like these:

Some white people grow up without much exposure to people of color. If you are white, being white may seem “just normal” to you, and so you may have not had much reason to think of “white” as part of your identity. If you have another racial/ethnic identity besides white, you may have some questions about the white identities of others around you.

This workshop is designed to help people who identify as white to explore that part of their identity—where it comes from, and what it means. If you are not bringing a white identity to our workshop today, or are not sure whether or not you identify as white, check in with yourself as we go along. Our time will help you understand how a white identity is formed. I hope all of us leave today with a stronger sense of our own racial/ethnic identity.

Variation

If you wish to help youth self-identify before using this video and you have the opportunity to meet twice with a group, have the youth meet initially to discuss the nine categories on the Cummings Identity Map. Have each youth fill out the Cummings Identity Map Worksheet and rank the nine aspects of their identities. Ask the youth to share their identity maps with their parents/guardians before the second meeting.

At the second session, instead of starting with the video begin by inviting participants to share their Cummings Identity Map Worksheets, including feedback from their parents/guardians. Then, show the video and lead discussion as guided below. If there is time at the end of the second session, have the youth put away their first Cummings Identity Map Worksheet and fill out a fresh worksheet with new rankings. Then, ask them to compare their first and second worksheets. Has anything changed? What? Why?

Materials

- Chalice and lighter
- Computer with Internet access and large monitor or digital projector
- [Handout 1](#), Definitions
- [Handout 2](#), Four Stages of White Identity Formation: A Model
- [Handout 3](#), Cummings Identity Map and Worksheet, and writing implements
- Optional: [Handout 4](#), Opening and Closing Readings
- Optional: Newsprint, markers, and tape

Creating a Safe Environment

Identity work can be empowering. It can also be painful. It is recommended that your minister, a lay minister or chaplain, or another adult experienced in pastoral care be present. You may also arrange for Rev. Dr. Monica L. Cummings, UUA Program Associate for Ministry to Youth and Young Adults of Color, to participate in this workshop in person or via Skype.

If the group has already made a covenant, refer participants to it at the start of the workshop. If any participants have not worked together before, immediately after the Opening guide the group to affirm a simple covenant. Make sure these points are included:

- Confidentiality: What is said in this group stays in this group.
- Speaking from personal experience: Speak for yourself, and allow others space to speak for themselves.
- Affirming everyone's right to their experiences and opinions: When needed, respectfully agree to disagree.

Video

Gather the group where all can see and hear the video. Play the video.

Opening

Light the chalice with opening words of your choice, or lead the responsive reading provided in **Handout 4, Opening and Closing Readings**.

Discussion

Distribute **Handout 1, Definitions**. Lead the group to read and process the definitions. Then, discuss these questions:

- What is your ethnicity?
- Is your congregation/youth group comfortable talking about members' different experiences related to ethnicity?
- Name some socially constructed categories that have been created to divide groups of people. [Race, economic class, English language fluency]
- What is the culture of your congregation/youth group?
 - How does the culture of your congregation/youth group empower you? How does it support your white identity formation?
 - How does the culture of your congregation/youth group dis-empower you and your white/ethnic identity?
 - What assumptions do you live with concerning your culture?
 - What assumptions do you live with concerning other cultures?

Point out that our society, in which white people are dominant, supports people who are white to live without thinking about some of these questions. Part of accepting a white identity is recognizing how it relates to the identities of people of color and/or people who belong to historically marginalized ethnic groups.

Ask the group to consider: "How segregated is your life?" Use these questions:

- What is the racial/ethnic makeup of your surroundings?
- Your family?
- Your friends?
- Your housing community?
- Your school?
- Your faith community?

Distribute **Handout 2, Four Stages of White Identity Formation**. Read aloud or have volunteers read all four stages. Then, process with these questions:

- What connections do you see between your life and the Four Stages?
- Give examples of experiences you have had that relate to the Four Stages.
- What assumptions have people made about you based on your skin color?
- What advantages have you received because of your skin color? How did that feel?

Distribute **Handout 3, Identity Map and Worksheet**, and writing implements. Go over the Cummings Identity Map with the group, making sure youth understand the nine aspects of identity it presents. Give participants about 10 minutes to complete their Identity Map worksheet.

Then, have participants rank the identity categories on their worksheet in order of each category's importance in their life, with 1 being most important and 9 being least important. Refer them to the Cummings Identity Map Example.

Use whatever method that works for you to organize participants in small groups to share their rankings. Encourage them to share with one another why they ranked the categories as they did.

Bring the large group back together. Ask participants to share highlights of small group discussions. Invite volunteers to share how they experienced the exercise.

Check-out and Closing

Have participants say in one or two sentences how they are feeling. Chaplains or minister need to pay close attention to what participants share, and be ready to follow up as needed.

Re-light the chalice, if needed. Offer closing words of your choosing or lead “Why the Past Matters,” the responsive reading provided in **Handout 4**.

Extinguish the chalice.

Resources

Goldberg, Susan B. and Cameron Levin. *Towards A Radical White Identity*. Accessed Dec. 9, 2011 on the AWARE-LA website, www.awarela.org

Helms, Janet. “White Racial Identity Development Model,” in *Multicultural Counseling Competencies: Individual and Organizational Development* (Sage Productions: Thousand Oaks, CA, 1998)

Thandeka. *Learning to Be White* (New York: Continuum, 2000)

Tochluk, Shelly. *Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It* (Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2010)

Wheatley, Margjorie Bowens, and Nancy Palmer Jones, eds. *Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2003)