

# CREATING THE CONTAINER

Created by Aida Cuadrado and adapted from the [BYP100 healing and accountability resource](#).

## Description:

Setting/resetting your group's container is one of the most important things you can do, but folks often want to skip this step because they worry more about what needs to get done instead of what it means to be in community with each other. You cannot call people in and up if you are not committed to defining how your group will be with each other. Taking the time to reset the container is time well spent.

By developing community commitments that honor what every person brings to the table, group members come to see equal value in their different identities and experiences. Through this activity, participants craft community agreements then explore the cultural, political and personal barriers to living up to them. Through this process, they 1) co-create a space that enables the surfacing of issues and identities that may be used for self-protection or to silence others and 2) develop shared commitment to how they will engage. This session should be facilitated the first time a group gathers as it lays the foundation for future learning and experiences. It should be revisited each time a group reconvenes.

## Purpose:

- To create community agreements that support a liberated zone, learning and growth
- To explore barriers to maintaining the community agreements and include the lived experience of structural racism using an intersectional/gender lens
- To develop shared commitment to sustaining a liberated space through reflection and body movement

## Outcomes:

- Participants create their unique community agreements and develop shared commitment to sustaining it
- They recognize common social, political and personal barriers to creating a liberated space that are rooted in white supremacy, patriarchy and capitalism
- They understand how generative conflict can support maintenance of a liberated space

## Connection to Vertical Development:

- Awaken - Participants recognize how white supremacy, patriarchy and capitalism inform their individual and collective beliefs and actions
- Unlearn + Discern - They reconceptualize how they can use community agreements to bring out the greatest relational aspects of their cohort

## Materials:

- [Creating a Liberated Zone slide deck](#)
- [Creating a liberated zone reflection worksheet](#)
- Music playlist (facilitator favorite: Lauren Hill, Solange, Eryka Badu, Jill Scott)
- Projector, speaker and other A/V equipment as needed
- Flip Chart paper, markers, journals, pens
- Readings (see end of this document)

## Preparation:

- Familiarize yourself with the definitions for culture and the information on what disorganizes us as related to culture, patriarchy and capitalism (see Part 2 ). You might also write them on chart paper or display in a slide.
- Familiarize yourself with the readings and plan how to incorporate them into the discussion on what disorganizes us as related to culture, patriarchy and capitalism and/or for the closing.
- Recreate the image that depicts white supremacy culture or print out copies and distribute it to your group. You can also create your own image.

## Process

- **Grounding and Intro - 20min**
- **Review of agenda - 5min**
- **Creating our Agreements - 40min**
- **What disorganized us? 5min**
- **Embodying our community agreements - 5min**
- **Close/Next steps - 5min**

**Process** (about 2 hours)

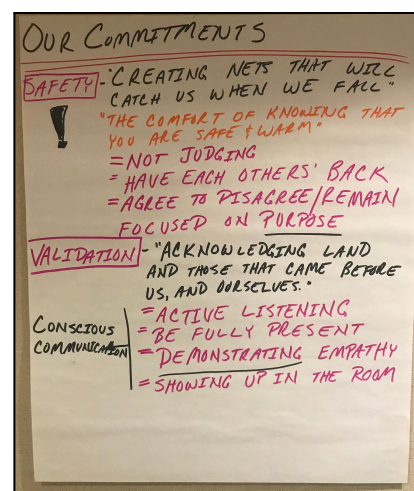
## Part 1: CREATING OUR AGREEMENTS

**Getting started** (10 mins): Share with the group that creating community is an intentional act. Therefore, before starting to think about what “community” means to us collectively it is important we have a clear understanding of what that looks like for us individually. Ask them to use their [worksheets](#) to answer the following:

- SAFETY in our group looks like, feels like and acts like?
- VALIDATION in our group looks like, feels like and acts like?
- TRUST in our group looks like, feels like and acts like?
- ACCOUNTABILITY in our group looks like, feels like and acts like?
- AFFIRMATION in our group looks like, feels like and acts like?
- TRANSPARENCY in our group looks like, feels like and acts like?

Before moving to the next component, share with the women that when we are triggered and or trying to work through conflict resolution we often do not know what we need in order to feel safe, validated, affirmed, etc.. This tool is useful to come back to in order to support yourself in finding clarity and to lean into creating constructive solutions.

**Small group exchange** (15 mins): Have the group break into diverse groups (mixed across race, nationality, organization, issue focus, geography, etc.) of about 5 people each, with each focusing on one component from the worksheet ( i.e., Safety, Validation, and so on). Ask each group to choose a **time keeper**, a **facilitator** and a **scribe**. They will then take turns sharing their responses while the scribe takes notes on chart paper that will help the group to identify common themes (e.g., a common thread is that “affirmation feels like being valued”). Also



ask the group to describe what each of the prompts looks like in action for (e.g., affirmation in action looks like clapping, head nods, snaps, cheering).

**Large group share out** (30 mins): Bring everyone back together and have the facilitator from each group report their ideas about safety toward capturing a consolidated version of it as a group agreement. It is important to capture the behavior in action (see pink words in above picture). Once each group's ideas have been added, ask if there is anything missing. Once complete, review only the **action** session for each prompt out loud as a group, then go around the room and ask each person if they can commit to these community agreements. A spoken affirmation or thumbs up will suffice. You can also ask for a raise of hands and to have each woman sign her name to the agreements.

**Ongoing commitment** (10 mins): Explain to the group that anytime there is a need to refocus on our agreements, we will come back to them in order to recenter ourselves and stay on purpose. (It is suggested that facilitators review the community agreements at the start of every meeting to make sure as a reminder of the group's commitments to the space and each other.)

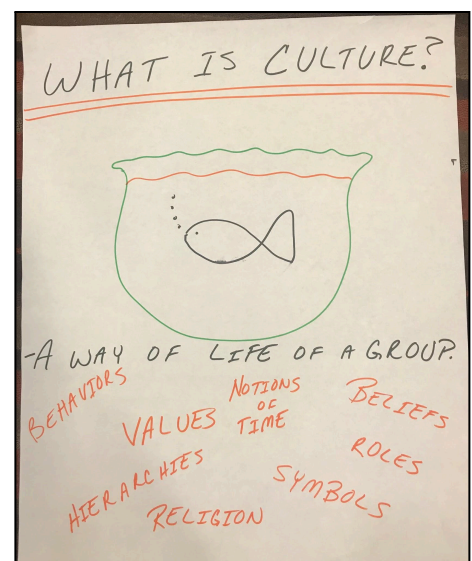
BREAK

## Part 2: WHAT DISORGANIZES US

**Agitational question** (10 mins): Open part two of the session by recognizing that the community agreements just created are amazing and asking, but what gets in the way of living up to them? What are the ways that we disorganize ourselves? What comes up for you personally? Think about your behavior, ego, self-beliefs, etc. Ask for a few volunteers to share their thoughts.

**What is culture?** (10 mins): Review the following definitions of culture and ask the group for their thoughts.

- Culture refers to the knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.
- Culture is the knowledge shared by a group of people.
- Culture is communication, communication is culture.
- Culture is a way of life of a group of people--the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.
- Culture is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.



An additional note: women play a central role in transmitting culture given their traditional duties in the home and including the prevalence of single headed households.

**Culture, Patriarchy & Capitalism** (10 mins): Display the information on what disorganizes us related to culture, patriarchy and capitalism below and review it with the group. Ask them for examples of each, for example, it's not uncommon that when a man and woman offer the same opinion/idea it will be attributed to the man. You could also have them reflect on the fish in water image to explain how white supremacy operates.

***What disorganizes us? What is white supremacy<sup>1</sup> culture?*** — White supremacist culture is the ideology or idea that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions are superior to those of BIPOC.

***What disorganizes us? Patriarchy*** — A social system in which men's ideas, beliefs, and behaviors hold primary power, political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property.

***What disorganizes us? Capitalism*** — An economic system where resources (\$, labor, etc.) are owned privately by individuals or companies. Decisions are based on profit/wealth for shareholders. The government's role is to make sure there is a level playing field for privately-run companies.

After making sure everyone understands the concepts and after a number of examples have been brought out, ask your group to reflect on these questions:

- *Does a man have to be in the room with us for patriarchy to show up?*
- *Does a white person need to be in the room for white supremacy to show up?*
- *Which of these characteristics are at play in your life? In the life of your organization or community?*
- *How do they stand in the way of justice?*
- *What can you and your community do to shift the belief(s) and behavior(s) to ones that support racial justice?*

Record their responses on large paper to be displayed at subsequent gatherings and for the women to take photos for their own documentation. Before closing this activity, summarize some of the main points you heard and remind the group that staying committed to our community agreements is how we counter white supremacy and stay organized to achieve our goals for the long run.

PAUSE

### **Part 3: EMBODYING OUR COMMUNITY COMMITMENTS**

(Adapted from Viveka Chen's GOG/WOW)

**Framing** (10 mins): Invite the women to play with you. Have everyone stand in a circle and take a minute to reflect about what it looks like to be in the Worst of the Worst (**WOW**) relationships with each other in their cohort. Tell them that on the count of three (1, 2, 3, sculpt!!), you want them to freeze into a human sculpture that embodies what the worst kind of behavior looks like

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture.html>

in action. (Some common poses are striking a fighting pose, having their backs turned, and yelling at each other.) Give them a moment to take in each other's sculptures before asking them to come back to the circle.

You can now remind them that we have all been in relationships like the ones they depicted, relationships that cause us to feel unsafe, devalued and in constant struggle.

Next, ask them to take a minute to reflect about what it looks like to be in the Greatest of the Greatest (**GOG**) relationship with each other in their cohort. Again, on the count of three they are to freeze into a sculpture that embodies what the greatest kind of behavior looks like in action. (Some common poses are hugging, high five-ing each other, clapping, and smiling.) Give them a moment to take in each other's sculptures before asking them to come back to the circle AND to hold on to that feeling!

*What is clearer now? Which feels more liberating?*

**Generative Conflict** (10 mins): Introduce the term **generative conflict**, if they are not already familiar with it and to reflect on it's meaning. Begin by covering the word *generative* and ask them what the word *conflict* brings up for them. *What does it feel like? And how do they usually respond to conflict?* After gathering some of their ideas, cover the word *conflict* and ask them to reflect on the word *generative*. *What does it bring up? What does it feel like?*

Now, uncover both words to describe *generative conflict* as is the ability to focus on creating something new out of conflict, such as a learning or solution. It does not mean our interactions will always result in goodness (rainbows and ice cream), but that it will generate possibilities to address conflict and harm, and to achieve liberation.

**To close**, remind the women that the community agreements are a guide to reground us when we start slipping into the Worst of the Worst (WOW), especially when we feel like we are being disorganized, and to reclaim our liberation to stay in the greatest of the greatest (GOG) relationships with each other and our work.

## READINGS

**On Culture: bell hooks** (excerpts from *Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place*, 2012)

Sublime silence surrounds me. I have walked to the top of the hill, plopped myself down to watch the world around me. I have no fear here, in this world of trees, weeds, and growing things. This is the world I was born into: a world of wild things. In it the wilderness in me speaks. I am wild. I hear my elders caution mama, telling her that she is making a mistake, letting me "run wild," letting me run with my brother as though no gender separates us. We are making our childhood together in the Kentucky hills, experiencing the freedom that comes from living away from civilization. Even as a child I knew that to be raised in the country, to come from the backwoods, left one without meaning or presence. Growing up we did not use terms like "hillbilly." Country folk lived on isolated farms away from the city; backwoods folks lived in remote areas, in the hills and hollers.

To be from the backwoods was to be part of the wild. Where we lived, black folks were as much a part of the wild, living in a natural way on the earth, as white folks. All backwoods folks were poor by material standards; they knew how to make do. They were not wanting to tame the wildness, in themselves or nature. Living in the Kentucky hills was where I first learned the importance of being wild.

**Gloria Anzaldúa** (from *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 1987)

Within us and within la cultura chicana, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture. Subconsciously, we see an attack on ourselves and our beliefs as a threat and we attempt to block with a counterstance.

But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor or oppressed; locked in a mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence. The counterstance refutes the dominant culture's views and beliefs, and, for this, it is proudly defiant. All reactions are limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. Because the counterstance stems from a problem with authority = outer as well as inner – it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes. Or perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory. Or we might go another route. The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react.