



On white Christian supremacy

White Christian supremacy pervades U.S. culture. This results in the oppression of individuals with marginalized religious, secular, and spiritual identities (RSSIs). Higher education has been complicit in white Christian supremacy; the associated phenomena of Christian privilege, hegemony, and normativity; and the oppression of minoritized RSSIs since its founding in the U.S. Higher education must therefore become complicit in the dismantling of these systems.

Dismantling White Christian Supremacy

The dismantling of white Christian supremacy within the system of higher education entails examining and acting in the areas of research, policy, and professional practice. The following concepts, adapted from Small (2020), should be applied when addressing the structures of white Christian supremacy within higher education. Research, policies, and professional practices should:

1. State their situatedness within an inherently Christian-dominated culture and institutional setting, and then act upon that declaration in order to mitigate these inequitable circumstances (p. 67);
2. Take steps to include all RSSIs, deliberately seeking out and emphasizing those identities that are frequently overlooked or discriminated against at a person-to-person level (p. 68);
3. Question basic assumptions that may actually be oppressive, resisting the natural urge to continue the work as it has always been done (p. 68); and
4. Follow a model of self-disclosure of identity (when safe and possible) by all scholars and practitioners, particularly from minoritized individuals and pluralists, and the raising up of these voices within publications and positions of authority on college campuses (p. 69).

On situatedness within an inherently Christian-dominated culture and institutional setting

A variety of strategies can be employed in research (such as interrogating frameworks, methodologies, and participant samples for Christian bias) and in policy and practice (such as through critiquing the origination and impact of physical artifacts, or through examining the experiences of majority and minoritized individuals on campus for differentiated outcomes. Succeeding at this guideline means remaining constantly aware of and then acting upon the varied impacts of power and privilege upon assumptions, guiding questions, outcomes, and deliverables. (Small, 2020, p. 67)



On taking steps to include all RSSIs

Taking steps toward full RSSI inclusion means critically examining religion's duality as both a source of liberation and a force of oppression in the lives of individuals minoritized in a variety of ways. It also means standing up against oppression from privileged religions, while simultaneously uplifting religiously minoritized individuals and encouraging their reliance upon their communities as a source of resistance. Scholarship and practice that is successful at this guideline also considers a third way of understanding religion: as a motivator for personal, positive agency, neither completely submitting to religion nor rejecting it out of hand (Small, 2020, p. 68).

On questioning basic assumptions that may actually be oppressive

The questioning of basic assumptions means disrupting very common practices in higher education, including normative language, if they are indeed built upon power, privilege, or marginalization. It also means vigilantly modeling pluralistic practices going forward, so as not to fall back into tendencies that seem neutral but are actually marginalizing. Succeeding at this guideline also entails addressing people of all religious, secular, and spiritual identities through the same pluralistic lens, as only pluralism has the capacity to transform systems toward full equity and inclusion. (Small, 2020, p. 68)

On following a model of self-disclosure of identity

Minoritized individuals must step forward, claim their rightful place in this work, and lead. Pluralists must go out of their way to bolster and amplify the voices of their minoritized peers (and themselves, if they identify in both of these categories), emphasizing the necessary coalitional nature of critical religious pluralism work. As success at this guideline entails self-disclosure by all individuals, this also includes declarations of identity from white, Christian allies. Until society is transformed, the ongoing privileging of Christian identities in this country obliges Christian allies to utilize their existing power as a tool for dismantling Christian supremacy, normativity, and hegemony. (Small, 2020, p. 69)

As institutions and a system that were built upon the structures of white Christian supremacy, higher education has an obligation to help dismantle these discriminatory systems. Only by taking on this overarching and quite challenging work can higher education make an intentional contribution to making society a more just and inclusive place for people with all religious, secular, and spiritual identities.

Reference

Small, J. L. (2020). *Critical religious pluralism in higher education: A social justice framework to support religious diversity*. Routledge.