

# Why Pay Attention to Race?

## Witnessing Whiteness Chapter 1

### Workshop 1.1

**Dear Facilitator(s),**

This workshop series was carefully crafted, reviewed (by a multiracial team), and revised with several important issues in mind.

The series is intended to...

1. **Offer an 11 part, sequential process that corresponds to the reading of the book, Witnessing Whiteness, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.** Understandably, facilitators, for various reasons, might want to use one or more of the workshops as stand alone events without sufficient time for participants to a) read the corresponding book chapters or b) move through the entire series. Yet, please understand that **moving through these workshops without having read the corresponding book chapter will markedly reduce its effectiveness. It will make moving through the workshop more challenging and is NOT recommended.** Understandings gained from one workshop are also important for subsequent workshops.
2. **Respond to particular group needs.** Recognizing that some groups may not be able to implement each workshop for the entire time suggested, some approved modifications can be found at the end of each workshop agenda. Only modify these workshops when absolutely required.
3. **Create a welcoming, inviting space where participants feel free to speak the truth of their experience without fear of shaming or reprisal.** It is essential for facilitators to understand that even when participants hold views that are counter to the themes in the book/series, a hallmark of both the book and the series is that people should be gently led into a new way of seeing.
4. **Follow logical threads of understanding related to each theme.** The language provided in the "scripts" that both precede and follow each section of the workshops are very important. Deviating from the essential themes and tone in those statements may create confusion and undercut the building nature of each individual workshop.
5. **Enhance leadership capacity within the community.** Detailed facilitator notes are provided for each activity so that one or more members of the group can practice their facilitation while leading this workshop series. A few notes of caution: a) the same facilitation team should run the entire series, b) the team should read the entire book in advance of leading any of the workshops, and c) sufficient debrief opportunities should be created to discuss how each workshop went so that facilitators' skills can be developed.
6. **Provide community building opportunities for either racially caucused white groups OR multiracial groups.** Although still focused on whiteness in general, the series seeks to frame activities and questions in ways that allow people of color to benefit from the experience.

Best wishes,  
Shelly Tochluk

# Why Pay Attention to Race?

## Witnessing Whiteness Chapter 1

### Workshop 1.1

#### Goals:

- Explore why we use certain strategies that keep us from paying attention to race
- Investigate the intentions and impacts of using race-distancing strategies
- Discuss the value of becoming race conscious

#### Materials:

- Discussion Guidelines
- Butcher Paper and Markers
- Intent and Impact (Handout 1.1.1)
- Resources (Handout 1.1.2) (distribute at facilitator's discretion)
- List of Terms/Context (Handout 1.1.3) (distribute at facilitator's discretion)

Book Anchor Quote: (Can be read aloud or distributed to the group during opening if desired.)  
Our avoidance of race can manifest in several different forms. We can deny the continuing effects of race and its categorizations, move toward ethnicity, become colorblind, and believe that we transcend race altogether. Important to acknowledge is that we can take up one or all of these approaches with the best of intentions. For many of us, the flight from paying attention to race is not made consciously. We are not aware that we are distancing ourselves from the problem instead of working toward a solution.

## SESSION 1 - *Why Pay Attention to Race?*

**3 hours**

*Section I*

*(20 min)*

### OPENING

**Materials:** Goals for day written out and communication guidelines posted ([download with discussion guide](#))  
butcher paper and markers

**Purpose of piece:**

To discuss communication guidelines and review the goals for the workshop

**Instructions:** *Facilitators introduce themselves, ask participants to say their name and one sentence to describe why they decided to come to the workshop. Ask participants to read the discussion guidelines posted on the wall aloud (one after the other). Ask participants what questions they have. Invite participants to add to the list any additional discussion guidelines they think would be helpful. Write them on the piece of butcher paper. Use this modified list for all future workshops.*

**WHAT I MEAN IS...**

*Purpose of piece:*

To explore why we use certain strategies that keep us from paying attention to race

**Facilitator Set Up:** Post three butcher paper posters around the room. Each one should have one of the following statements and both sentence starters:

<p><b>When someone says, “race is not real”</b></p> <p>What s/he means is...</p> <p>What s/he hopes is...</p>	<p><b>When someone says, “he transcends race”</b></p> <p>What s/he means is...</p> <p>What s/he hopes is...</p>	<p><b>When someone says, “I’m colorblind”</b></p> <p>What s/he means is...</p> <p>What s/he hopes is...</p>
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**Instructions:** Explain to participants that they are going to travel around the room and write an ending to each of the sentences written on each of the three posters. Offer a few examples to ensure that participants understand what to do. (see “say to group” section for examples.)

**Say to group:** For our first exercise today we are going to explore a few really common ways that people talk about how they see themselves in terms of race.

- The three we’ll concentrate on today are 1) colorblindness, 2) transcendence (or being “beyond” race), and 3) believing that race is not real. What I’d like you to do is think about moments when you’ve either thought these things yourself or heard someone else say these things.
- Think about what ideas and hopes underlie the use of these statements. Go around the room, in any order, and write what you believe the person means and hopes when using these statements. For example:
  - When I used to say I was **colorblind**, I meant I wasn’t racist. What I hoped was that the person hearing me would see me as a good person.
  - When I used to say I said I **transcended** race, I meant that I felt like my deeply spiritual/religious sense is beyond race. What I hoped was that we could see each other for the beauty of what lies beneath our skin.
  - When I used to say **race is not real**, what I meant was that although biology might determine someone’s appearance that race categories don’t coherently accommodate all groups when you try to fit them into traditional terms. The whole idea is a confusing mess that humans made up. So, when I said race isn’t real I hoped that people would stop concentrating on race so that we can just worry about treating each other as human beings.
- Are there any questions? **(10 minutes)**

**Instructions:** Once all participants have written on each of the posters, ask one person to read each of the posters aloud. Stop after each one and ask if anything should be added to the poster or if anything needs to be clarified. Allow discussion if participants feel prompted to explore the intentions and hopes. **(20 minutes)**

**Facilitator Notes:** Allow participants to explore their answers and ask each other some questions. But, if they begin to speak on issues treated in later exercises (such as the negative impacts of using those terms), you can inform participants that those ideas will be part of our later discussion and that the essential point for THIS exercise is to explore INTENT. Try to ask follow up questions to expand on the various intentions that people have for using these approaches.

**Wrap up:** What we want to highlight through this short exercise is that many of us use these statements as a way to tell ourselves and the people we talk with that we don't see ourselves as racist and don't want to be seen as holding prejudices. Unfortunately, believing we are colorblind or beyond race can create problems for us. This is what we will explore in our next exercise.

Section III

(1 hr)

## INTENT VERSUS IMPACT

**Materials:** Intent/Impact resource for each participant to be distributed at end of section (Handout 1.1.1).

**Purpose of piece:**

To investigate the intentions and impacts of believing that 1) race is not real and therefore we shouldn't pay attention to our race, 2) we are colorblind, and 3) we transcend race.

**Say to group:** Just because a person's intentions when using the three approaches we just talked about are good, that does not necessarily mean that they lead to positive outcomes.

- For this exercise we need to be in small groups – Create small groups of 4-5 people by determining how many groups you'll need and then counting off by that number. (For example, a group of 12 should have 3 groups of four people, so you would count off 1, 2, and 3. All ones get together, all twos get together, all threes get together to make 3 groups.)
- Once participants are seated in their small groups...continue with the following...
- What we'd like to do now is explore our own beliefs about the statements we just discussed.
  - As we do this, let us keep in mind that all of us have developed our approaches to these things out of our life experiences.
  - The activity we are going to do is NOT about naming anyone as being WRONG.
  - Our purpose is to have discussions with people who can help us explore why we believe what we do and what that might mean for people around us.
- To do this I am going to ask you a series of questions.
- For each question, you will decide how you feel about the issue and show me by putting up between 1 and five fingers next to your chest so that only I can see them. For example, if I ask "To what degree do you believe orange juice helps you get energized in the morning?" and you feel orange juice is VERY helpful you will put up 5 fingers. But if you feel orange juice is NOT AT ALL helpful you would show me only 1 finger. If you feel somewhere in the middle, you could show either 2, 3, or, 4 fingers.
- Are there any questions?

There are three main questions, each with a follow up question. **(15 min. for each = 45 min total)**

**QUESTION #1: To what degree do you believe that saying you are colorblind can be helpful in terms of us dealing with race?**

- Participants show the facilitator their current position by showing from 1-5 fingers near their chest.
- Invite participants to talk to their small group about why they picked the number they did. (2 minutes).
- Invite participants to share out with the group. Take a few responses.

- Ask the follow up question:
  - **How might saying you are colorblind impact someone negatively? In other words, even if it is meant positively, how might people understand it in a way that can be hurtful?**

**Facilitator's Note:** Move about the room, listening in to the conversations. As participants dialogue on the follow up question you'd like to help draw out the following ideas if they are not already being discussed.

*Saying that you are colorblind can give the message that...*

1. *Race shouldn't matter in a person of color's life...when it usually does – so it can deny someone's lived experience*
2. *We will likely ignore them if they tell us there is subtle racism present in what we say or do*
3. *We are inattentive to how racism and privilege play out in our society and institutions*

Use the following questions as needed:

Ask participants:

1. *Think about an aspect of your life that is significant and meaningful for how you are treated in the world. Perhaps it's your gender or some other visible characteristic. Imagine that someone tells you that s/he doesn't see that part of you. How would that feel? What are the implications of that if you feel that you are treated poorly because of that characteristic? What if it's an aspect of yourself that makes you feel really good, and the person is saying that it is irrelevant to how they experience you?*

**QUESTION #2: To what degree do you believe that thinking you transcend race can be helpful?**

- Hold up fingers
- Invite dialogue (2 minutes)
- Invite share outs to the whole group
- Ask the follow up question:
  - **How can saying you are transcend race impact someone negatively? In other words, even if it is meant positively, how can people understand it in a way that can be hurtful?**

**Facilitator's Note:** Move about the room, listening in to the conversations. As participants dialogue on the follow up question you'd like to help draw out the following ideas if they are not already being discussed.

*Saying that you transcend race can give the message that...*

1. *We are not going to see that we might carry lingering racism within us*
2. *We don't see how race has shaped our attitudes and behaviors*
3. *We see race conscious people as less evolved than those who believe they have moved beyond race*
4. *We believe seeing racism is the problem in itself*

Use the following questions as needed:

Ask participants:

1. *If you are saying you are "beyond" something, as though it's not important, what does that say to a person who is still finding it very meaningful? What does it suggest about how open you might be to talking about the subject?*

**QUESTION #3: To what degree do you believe that avoiding labeling yourself as having a race is helpful? For example, by saying something like, "The only race I'm part of is the human race."**

- Hold up fingers
- Invite dialogue (2 minutes)
- Invite share outs to the whole group
- Ask the follow up question:

- **How can saying that you don't have a race impact someone negatively? In other words, even if it is meant positively, how can people understand it in a way that can be hurtful?**

**Facilitator's Note:** Move about the room, listening in to the conversations. As participants dialogue on the follow up question you'd like to help draw out the following ideas if they are not already being discussed.

*Saying that you don't have a race can give the message that...*

1. *We don't want to see ourselves as part of our racial group and we don't want to see how our group's general tendencies might affect our attitudes and behaviors*
2. *We refuse to see ourselves as part of supporting societal racism since we don't see ourselves as part of a "race issue"*

Use the following questions as needed:

Ask participants:

1. *If we say we're not part of a certain group, what does that say about how we feel about that group? What message do you think it gives about our willingness to consider how we might behave similarly? What might it say about our openness to learning something new about how we relate to that group?*

### Large Group Debrief: (15 minutes)

All participants can be asked to take their seats in the circle.

- **To what degree have the conversations during this section either shifted, clarified, or validated your perspective?** (Give a couple of minutes for people to share with a person sitting next to them. Then share out with the group.)
- **Why is it important for us to know about the negative impacts that can be generated from race distancing strategies?** (Give a couple of minutes for people to share with a person sitting next to them. Then share out with the group.)

**Wrap Up:** The point of this activity is to acknowledge that there are many people who avoid seeing themselves as paying attention to race or being a part of a racial group with good intentions.

- Usually, this is because we were taught this as a way to move forward and end discrimination.
- Unfortunately, there are some serious downsides to each of those approaches, and they are serious enough to make us take a close look at what it would mean for us to start paying attention to race.
- Our next activity will help us do that.

**BREAK      BREAK      BREAK      BREAK      BREAK      BREAK      BREAK** (15 min)

### Section IV

(50 min)

## **MOVING FORWARD: BECOMING RACE CONSCIOUS**

**Materials:** Small group questions written on butcher paper

**Purpose of piece:**

To talk about what it would mean for a person to become race-conscious

**Instructions:** Ask all participants to sit in a circle and get comfortable.

**Say to group:** A lot of people are hesitant to give up saying they are colorblind or transcend race because paying attention to race brings with it a lot of challenges.

- For all of us on this journey, paying attention to race can be at times frightening and learning how to avoid hurting people's feelings, deciding to become conscious of race and pay attention to it can be really frightening.

- So, now what we are going to do is take some time to imagine what life could be like once we've developed some skills. **(10 minutes)**

***(Facilitator reads meditation script in a slow, calm voice.)***

Let's start by getting comfortable in your chair or on the floor.

Close your eyes.

Feel your body relax.

Feel your shoulders start to sink down into your body.

Feel the weight of your body press down into the chair (or ground).

Now imagine that you are walking into a room with a mixed race group to have a discussion about race.

What concerns do you have?

What emotions arise?

What skills do you wish you had to be able to navigate the discussion you're about to have?

Now imagine that you have all the skills you need to talk about race with people in the room.

You understand why people are reacting like they are.

You know what to say to help the group come to some resolution.

You don't have to walk on eggshells because you know how to say what you mean in ways that don't cause someone to become offended or upset.

You are not weighted down by guilt or shame. Instead, although you may not be perfect, you feel authentic, open, and curious. And, you feel proud that you've learned as much as you have.

You are not worried about how you are going to be seen. Instead, you feel confident.

You are confident enough in your antiracism practice to answer anyone who might ask you a question.

Not only do you feel more confident when you're with this group...but you have also been able to develop deeper relationships across race with other people in your life.

Your friends and/or colleagues trust you and tell you things that they don't share with other people who they don't think would understand.

You are also able to share your whole self with them, all of your questions and concerns.

You are trusted by people of different races as someone who can be counted on as an ally, who is part of a movement to call out racial injustice in ways that helps people learn and grow.

Think about this for a moment...

What if all this was true for you?

What if all this was true for you?

Take a moment to consider this while you prepare to open your eyes and come back into the room.

**Say to group:** We're now going to divide up into small groups to talk about what it could mean for our lives to develop this level of skill and confidence. Recall that we are prompted to do this because of the serious negative consequences of avoiding race by seeing ourselves as colorblind, transcending race, etc.

Count off from 1 to 4, divide into four groups (no more than 6 people per group) --- hopefully each group can have an experienced facilitator. *(Questions should be written and posted on butcher paper)*

Small group dialogue questions: **(25 minutes)**

1. What feelings come up when you think about feeling this confident about your ability to handle race issues?
2. In what ways could having this level of understanding and skill benefit you in your home, work, or school environment?
3. What kinds of support would you need to develop this level of skill and understanding?

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Large group debrief: **(15 minutes)** *(It is okay if all questions cannot be answered fully due to timing)*

1. What feelings do people have when they think about trying to create an antiracist practice that requires them to pay attention to race?
2. What is at stake if we do not take up this work to develop this level of skill?
3. What kind of support do we need in order to make antiracism an active part of our lives?

**Wrap Up:** The strategies we use to avoid dealing with race, like saying we're colorblind or that we transcend race, come with some pretty big negatives.

- On the other hand, if we decide to pay attention to race, we often have to face a great deal of fear and other difficult feelings.
- One way to move forward is to concentrate on what skills we would like to develop.
- Then, we can get together as a group to help each other learn more about race, reduce our anxieties, and become confident in our antiracist practice.

*Section V*

*(5 min)*

## CLOSING

*Purpose of piece:*

To acknowledge what we did today, bridge to next workshop, and allow people to check out of the space

**Instructions:** *Ask participants to name one type of support they identified that would help them develop their skills and understanding. Tell participants what comes next in your program plan. Review what they might consider as they prepare for your next session.*

## WORKSHOP 1 MODIFICATIONS

### Suggested

If you are unable to complete the entire 3-hour workshop, here are some alterations that could satisfy some goals:

- **2 hour option**
  - Limit Section II to reading out posted statements and clarifying. Do not offer time for participant engagement, explaining that a later exercise will give them time to explore the issues. (reduces by 10 minutes)
  - Reduce the amount of sharing allowed for Section III questions to 10 minutes per issue, and ask only the second large group debrief question at the end. (reduces by 20 minutes)
  - In Section IV, stay in large group, but only treat the small group questions. (reduces by 15 minutes)
  - Eliminate the break (reduces by 15 minutes)
- **1 hour, 30 minute option**
  - **(use only if absolutely necessary, as section III is essential for building motivation and investment)**
  - Open briefly (don't ask for additions to guidelines)
  - Ask the questions in Section II, but participants can share out with the group orally instead of writing on the posters (very abbreviated)
  - Most essential piece is Section III, but can reduce some of the time on particular questions
  - Skip Section III completely
- **1 hour option**
  - **(use only if your purpose is purely community building and creating a sense of buy in. This strategy will not increase essential understandings)**
  - Opening with no discussion guidelines except agreement around confidentiality, move directly to Section IV, and close