

List of Terms/Context

Intent vs. Impact

Paying attention to this difference can help during conversations about race and racism.

- **Intent:** What one intends through speech or action.
- **Impact:** How one's speech or action is perceived or experienced by another

**** When dealing with race it is usually far more productive to deal with IMPACT, not INTENT. Most people do not intend to speak or act in ways that reinforce bias, prejudice, or racism. Unfortunately, people often unconsciously act in ways that hurt or offend others. If we hope to have productive dialogues on race, we need to stay open to hear about how even our best efforts are experienced in unintended ways.*

Colorblindness (book excerpt)

There are three basic problems with using the term *colorblind*. First, the entire idea of colorblindness is a lie. Of course we see color. Of course we perceive different skin tones and the physical features most commonly associated with racial categories. To tell ourselves differently denies reality. Colorblindness is a complete fabrication. Alone, this argument might appear unimportant, calling up a response such as, "Sure, I see color, but what I mean is that a person's color doesn't *mean* anything." This moves us into the second area of trouble with colorblindness.

When we say that we do not see another person's color, what we essentially are saying is that we do not see a person's racial placement as meaningful. Basically, we are saying that we do not see the ways that a person of color experiences the world differently than does a white appearing person. Worse, being colorblind usually means that since we do not see differential experiences, people of color will have to convince us that race continues to matter in their lives.

Finally, white people tend not to speak of being colorblind when speaking of interactions with other whites. Colorblindness really only comes up when we speak of how we see, or do not see, people of color. We are essentially saying that there is something about people "of color" that should not be seen. This implies that there is something negative about being associated with color and that there is no value in being recognized as a person of color. In essence, we are saying, "I don't hold this part of who you are against you." Although there are many people of color who use this term to indicate they do not hold our whiteness against us, there are far more who reject the colorblindness approach for the above reasons.

Transcendence (book excerpt)

When we see ourselves as "beyond race," we often align our belief system with our sense of spiritual being and a more hopeful future. It does not really matter to which faith community we belong. From this perspective, we focus on what is most inherently meaningful about our lives. We very often search for what "resonates" with us, that which fits with our individual experience of the world. Race, as a fabricated concept itself, understandably does not fit with our deep sense of self. And racism is something that strikes such painful chords that we wish for it to disappear altogether.

For many white people, our belief that our experience of the world transcends race also comes with additional values. Many of us who are dedicated to transcendence as a broader ideal also have a sense of spirituality that manifests as a deeply felt connection with all people and things. This sense of connection can translate into a desire and push toward creating community, wholeness, togetherness, or oneness. Spiritually oriented people are oftentimes committed to expanding consciousness, continued growth, and becoming more compassionate people in the world as well.

Although paradoxical, our efforts toward racial transcendence can sometimes thwart our ability to truly live out those spiritual goals. Transcending race can sometimes mean remaining unaware of how racial identity affects our way of being in the world. But if part of life's effort is to be more connected to others, then being less aware of how our whiteness plays out seriously jeopardizes our chances of truly coming together with other individuals. How can people tell us about how racial dynamics affect them if we refuse to acknowledge that race remains significant in people's lives?

If the majority of whites choose transcendence and claim we are living in a post-racial society, and the majority of people of color call out for an increased focus on race in efforts to hold whites accountable for continuing racism, then who is the more evolved? Whose perspective receives attention? In white people, the idea of transcending race can unintentionally perpetuate a sense of superiority that can prove damaging when people of color and whites come together in dialogue and community building.

Race is not Real (book excerpt)

Many of us reject racial whiteness as a personal identifier when we are ready to say that we disagree with the divisions that race perpetuates, the false categorizations that do not offer exact, accurate self-reflection. Through this argument, we hope to demonstrate that we will not be fooled into continuing a fundamentally flawed system of naming.

Deciding that we are not white also, however, allows us to scratch racial identity off of our already crowded to-do list. We can move on with our lives, imagining that issues of race are taken care of as far as it relates to us. Sure, there are plenty of people who identify with race and prejudiced viewpoints—but we are no longer part of the “race problem” because we are not part of the race. Those of us taking on this approach generally are philosophically opposed to prejudice, so we do not see ourselves doing anything that would cause distress in anyone from another group.

Unfortunately, there is also a subtle implication in this approach that often goes unnoticed by white people, but it is hardly lost on a good number of people of color. The implication is this: If we reject being called white, we also reject the idea that we are connected to a broader, white culture.

Distancing ourselves from our discomfort with racial identity by claiming that we are not white betrays our hopes. Although we hope that the distance excuses us from being a part of the problem of race, our denials do not stop us from being treated as white. Philosophically rejecting whiteness does not stop us from escaping racial profiling.

The American Anthropological Association put out a “Statement on Race” to reflect the thinking of most contemporary scholars. Within the statement they note:

“In the United States both scholars and the general public have been conditioned to viewing human races as natural and separate divisions within the human species based on visible physical differences. With the vast expansion of scientific knowledge in this century, however, it has become clear that human populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated, biologically distinct groups. . . . Historical research has shown that the idea of ‘race’ has always carried more meanings than mere physical differences; indeed, physical variations in the human species have no meaning except the social ones that humans put on them.”

Additional Working Definitions and Context for Discussions on Race:

Prejudice

1. an unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought, or reason.
2. any preconceived opinion or feeling, either favorable or unfavorable.
3. unreasonable feelings, opinions, or attitudes, esp. of a hostile nature, regarding a racial, religious, or national group.

**** Everyone likely has prejudices by virtue of us receiving a constant stream of inaccurate messages about people through media sources.*

Bias

1. a particular tendency or inclination, esp. one that prevents unprejudiced consideration of a question; prejudice.

**** The behavioral inclination that arises out of a prejudice. This may be conscious OR unconscious. You may have biases of which you are not consciously aware.*

Racism

1. a belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human races determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to rule others.
2. a policy, system of government, etc., based upon or fostering such a doctrine; discrimination.
3. hatred or intolerance of another race or other races.

**** The belief in inherent differences that has at one time translated into policies or systems that have perpetuated and/or fostered those beliefs. One may enact racism on a personal level OR racism may be systemic, reinforcing or arising out of old systems of discrimination*

An example to illustrate how these three terms can be distinct, but build upon each other:

- **Prejudice:** My family lived in a middle class neighborhood and thought that people with less money were also sloppy, dirty, and didn't have clean homes. **(Belief based)**
- **Bias:** My parents didn't want me playing with the kids from the nearby apartment complex because they thought they kids would be a bad influence **(Belief turns into action)**
- **Racism:** I had little opportunity to interact with kids of color because the kids of color lived in the apartments because of institutionalized systems of economic benefits for white people that my family enjoyed (GI bill, family transfer of wealth, etc.) **(Action supports the continuation of segregated lives set in place via public policies such as red lining)**