

# Reciprocal and Transformative Relationships

## Witnessing Whiteness Chapter 6 Workshop 6

**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 decide 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

# Reciprocal and Transformative Relationships

## Witnessing Whiteness Chapter 6 Workshop 6

### Goals:

- Describe the qualities of reciprocal and transformative relationships
- Explore how conflict is dealt with in cross race relationships
- Identify strategies that can enhance and/or deepen cross race relationships

### Materials:

- Relationship Qualities Brainstorm (Handout 6.1)
- Venn Diagram example (Sheet 6.2)
- Four corners answer sheets (posted, two sets – one green, one blue ink)
- Conflict Scenarios (Handout 6.3a)
- Conflict Scenarios – Facilitator’s Guide (Sheet 6.3b)
- Butcher paper for note taking
- Pens

Book Anchor Quote: (Can be read aloud or distributed to the group during opening if desired.)

Courageously choosing to engage the journey toward witnessing whiteness entails continually bumping into our blind spots. What do we still not see about ourselves? How are we supposed to respond to critique? Just as with our literal eyesight, there are gradations to our capacity to see ourselves clearly. This can pose serious problems. We operate amidst a sea of relationships and we need to be able to communicate effectively and consider the needs of our friends and colleagues.

Although we might already have some really deep and meaningful relationships across race, it can be helpful to remind ourselves that everyone has different needs and sensitivities. Learning more about some frequent patterns of conflict can help us as we form new and deeper cross race relationships and collaborations.

## SESSION 7 - Reciprocal and Transformative Relationships

3 hrs

*Section 1*

*(15 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 go around in a circle and say their name and how old they were when they formed their first cross race friendship or relationship.*

- *Ask participants to read the discussion guidelines posted on the wall.*
- *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.*

**Section II***(10 min)***True for you...?**

**Materials:** None

**Purpose of piece:**

To allow participants to reflect on past experience with cross race relationships

**Say to Group:** To get warmed up today we are going to reflect briefly on a series of questions about how we have experienced and learned about cross race friendships and relationships.

**Instructions:** *Invite all participants to stand up in a circle. Tell them you are going to read a set of statements. If the statement is true for them, then they should take a step forward. If the statement is not true for them, then they should stay where they are. After the group has had a chance to consider the statement and decided whether to step forward or not, participants should be asked to step back to their original position.*

We'll start with a practice one just to make sure we all understand. Step forward if this is true for you. "I came to participate in this workshop today." Everyone should take a step forward. Ok, now everyone take a step back to your original position and I'll read the next statement.

**Facilitator's Note:** *For questions that might require some reflection, such as questions 4 through 8, ask participants to listen and reflect for about 10 seconds before stepping forward.*

Step forward/Stay back statements:

1. I attended schools that had a lot of racial diversity.
2. I have had several people of a different racial background as teachers.
3. My parents taught me that people of a different racial background have a lot of important information to convey to me.
4. I have learned a lot from people of a different racial background than me.
5. I have considered a person of a different racial background than me a very close friend.
6. I have considered a person of a different racial background than me a mentor.
7. My cross race friendships/relationships have significantly influenced my beliefs and behaviors.
8. In my experience, cross race friendships and relationships are usually very challenging.
9. I enjoy engaging in conversations that involve conflict.
10. I have been known to shut down or leave a conversation when it starts to involve a lot of conflict.

**Facilitator's Note:** *This activity can produce discomfort in individuals whose life experiences are marked by segregation. Be prepared to validate the tension and emotion that can arise when one begins to acknowledge an absence of cross-race connections throughout one's lifetime. A simple statement*

recognizing that this activity can be difficult might be said to the group if the facilitator notices that there are individuals who are never taking a step forward.

**Wrap Up:** Since today's workshop asks us to explore how we can create more reciprocal and transformative relationships across race, what experiences and tendencies we bring to the table will be important to acknowledge.

- As you can see... (facilitator should name a few patterns noticed from watching participants step forward or stay back, while avoiding naming any particular individual.)
- We are now going to go deeper into questions about the qualities of relationships we find valuable.

### Section III

(50 min)

## My Friend and Mentor

**Materials:** Relationship Qualities Brainstorm list (Handout 6.1), blank venn diagram example (Sheet 6.2) (draw on butcher paper), pens

### Purpose of piece:

To describe the qualities of reciprocal and transformative relationships through an inquiry into valued qualities of friends and mentors

**Say to Group:** One of the really wonderful and challenging aspects of cross-race relationships involves the way they can teach us important lessons.

- A frequent challenge is that quite often cross-race relationships end up relying heavily on one person to do the teaching and the other to do the learning.
- On the other hand, a mutual and reciprocal learning can also take place.
- As we move forward in considering how to create reciprocal and transformative relationships across race, it may be helpful for us to spend some time considering what we think about friendship and mentorship in general.
- Then, we might be able to tease apart how these two ideas are operating in our current relationships.

*Divide the participants into groups of 4 or 5 and distribute Handout 6.1 to each participant.*

To begin, we'd like each person to take a few minutes to quickly make three lists. First, write a list of your closest cross race friendships/relationships. Second, make a list of qualities you believe are part of a valuable friendship. Third, make a list of the qualities that are part of a valuable mentorship relationship. (10 minutes)

*Once they have done that, invite participants to share their lists regarding the qualities of relationships with their small group. Ask them to notice areas of similarity and difference. (5 min)*

**Instructions:** Now take your ideas and create a large venn diagram on a piece of butcher paper

- Show participants the example (Sheet 6.2) for those who haven't used a venn diagram recently.
- You should label the right circle "mentorship" and the left circle "friendship"
- For the qualities that ONLY apply to friendships according to your lists, put them in the section of the circle that only applies to friendships. Do the same for mentorship on the other side of the page. For the qualities that apply to BOTH friendships and mentorship, be sure to write them in the center section, the part that is within both circles. (15 minutes)

When you finish creating your Venn diagrams, post them on the wall.

When all are posted, invite participants to walk around to read each of them, observe them as though it were a gallery. When they have all read the diagrams, participants should return to their seats in the circle. (5 minutes)

Large Group Dialogue (15 minutes)

1. What did you notice as we did this activity?
  2. To what degree would you characterize your deepest cross-race relationships as 1) friendships, 2) mentorship relationships, or 3) both?
  3. When considering your cross-race relationships, to what degree do you find yourself acting as either the mentor or the mentee when discussing cross-racial differences?
  4. To what degree do you consider these relationships reciprocal? In what ways?
  5. To what degree do you consider these relationships personally transformative? How?
- \*\*\*For questions 4 and 5 participants can discuss any aspect of the relationship. It may include learning about cross-race differences, or it may involve professional roles, etc.*

**Wrap Up:** The point of this process was to explore to what degree our cross-race relationships are experienced as friendships and/or mentorship relationships.

- This is important because there is a long history of cross race relationships between white people and people of color where the person of color ends up spending an inordinate amount of energy teaching the white person.
- If we are going to create honestly reciprocal AND transformative relationships that serve each person, it's really important that we be able to honestly 1) observe to what degree mutual benefit is present and 2) talk about what qualities are desired in the relationship.
- To do this, the relationships have to be sufficiently deep so that trust can develop on both sides.
- Often, this means that we need to be able to navigate areas of conflict.

*Section IV*

*(25 min)*

### **The Question of Conflict**

**Materials:** Four corners answer pages (two sets), posted at four corners of the room

**Purpose of piece:**

To explore how conflict is dealt with in cross race relationships

**Say to Group:** We'd now like to spend some time talking about how we have experienced conflict in our cross race relationships. To do this we are going to do a four corners activity. Everyone please stand in the center of room to begin.

I'm now going to ask a question. Please go to the corner where the sign best characterizes what has been true for you. This is a forced choice activity so even though it may be really hard to only choose one, for the sake of this activity, please choose the answer that has been most true for you.

1. What has been the primary role conflict has played in your deepest cross race relationships?  
Answer choices (written in green):  
1) No conflict, 2) Increased tension, 3) Inspired Growth, 4) Affected trust

*Once participants have moved to a corner, ask them to find a partner where they are standing and talk about what made them choose that location. (5 minutes to discuss)*

*After 5 minutes (or when discussion dies down), invite participants back into the center of the room. Tell them they will now hear a second question and now they will choose one of the blue signs as their answer.*

2. How has conflict been dealt with when it has arisen?

Answer choices (written in blue)

- 1) No conflict, 2) Smoothing over, 3) Avoidance, 4) Engaged/Encouraged Discussion

*Once participants have moved to a corner, ask them to find a partner where they are standing and talk about how their approach to conflict has affected their relationship. (5 minutes)*

*Invite participants to return to their seats in the circle.*

Large Group Debrief: (10 minutes)

1. Were there any surprises or important realizations?
2. To what degree do you believe your relationships would benefit from you having more strategies for dealing with conflict?

**Wrap Up:** One of the hardest things we might have to do is self-reflect and acknowledge that the way we deal with conflict is not as healthy or productive as it could be.

- A particularly challenging part might be looking at how we distance ourselves so much from conflict-laden issues that we simply avoid the whole thing.
- Unfortunately, this might leave us with a lesser level of trust and/or a more superficial relationship than we otherwise might have.
- Whatever our experiences have been, it can be useful to spend time looking into some common areas of conflict and talking about how we can best navigate through them. This is what we'll pick up on when we return from our break.

**BREAK 15 minutes**

**BREAK 15 minutes**

**BREAK 15 minutes**

**BREAK 15 min**

*Section V*

*(60 min)*

## **What would you do?**

Materials: Scenario sheets (Handout 6.3a) and Facilitator's Key (Sheet 6.3b)

Purpose of piece:

To identify strategies that can enhance and/or deepen cross race relationships

**Say to Group:** For this final exercise of the day, we are going to explore some really common conflict situations and collectively imagine how we could more effectively handle them.

- This is important for each of us even if we believe that our cross race relationships do not need us to improve in this area.
- We can think of it in terms of creating our own anti-racist practice. It helps us when we can recognize common themes and helpful strategies, as that can help us support other people when they run into difficulty.
- We will be exploring different scenarios and preparing a short role-play to present to the larger group. Although all groups will go through the discussion and preparation, we may not have time to actually see all groups present, depending upon the depth of conversation that is sparked.

**Facilitator's Notes:** *It may be helpful to cut the scenario page (Handout 6.3a) into thirds and only distribute the portion of the sheet necessary for each group. If the entire sheet is distributed it could lead to confusion or distraction.*

*Divide the participants into 3 groups, assign each group a scenario, which they will read through silently, choose roles, and present to the larger group. Give each group a scenario and time to prepare. For*

participants who have had extensive experience in cross-race relationships, alert them that they are welcomed to improvise or alter the content to make the scenario more meaningful for them. (10 minutes)

Also, ask participants to begin by reading the scenario silently. Participants should be asked to stay attentive to how role plays can often degenerate into actors utilizing stereotypes. Be cognizant to avoid people “acting” like a person of a different racial background than themselves in a way that draws on stereotypes. This should be named aloud to the group as a potential problem that all participants should be on guard to avoid. If the scenarios are followed, much of the difficulty may lie in gesture, tone of voice, and improvised statements. Tell people to be especially careful regarding these areas. One way to help people reduce feeling the need to act using stereotypes is to have participants name the racial background of each character being acted out when introducing their scenario.

Group 1 presents and when finished invites the audience to offer responses, what they observed that was problematic and what they would suggest could be done differently. (10 minutes)

Group 2 presents and when finished invites the audience to offer responses, what they observed that was problematic and what they would suggest could be done differently. (10 minutes)

Group 3 presents and when finished invites the audience to offer responses, what they observed that was problematic and what they would suggest could be done differently. 10 minutes)

**Facilitator’s Note:** You may find that a rich discussion arises after one or two groups and you will need to determine if time should be spent staying with just one example or moving forward. This is a very tight agenda in terms of time, so you might want to focus on only two groups. It is okay if not all groups have a chance to present as long as they have been prepared for this possibility ahead of time.

Large Group Debrief Questions: (15 minutes)

*\*\*Facilitator should take notes on BP as participants are sharing out. This can become a saved list.  
\*\*The idea is to end up with two different lists, the things people should avoid, and the things people could do that might be helpful.*

1. What did people in the scenes do that you think would negatively affect their relationship? Explain
2. What did people in the replayed scenes do that you think would enhance or deepen their relationship? Explain

**Wrap Up:** Creating reciprocal and transformative cross race relationships that benefit both parties is not easy.

- It is really common for one of us to come into the relationship having a lot to learn about race and this often leaves our friends needing to take up more of a mentorship position than they’d really like. This is especially true for white people who are newly learning about racism and white privilege.
- If we have any hope of working through these situations, what we really need to do is learn to deal really well with the conflict that would inevitably arise.
- The more we can learn some strategies for staying in difficult conversations and really staying open to the learning that we can get from those moments, the more we will be able to have deeply trusting relationships. This is really a fundamental need for our relationships to be mutually beneficial.

*Section VI*

*(5 min)*

## **Closing**

**Materials:** None

*Purpose of piece:*

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

**Say to Group:** Thank you very much for your participation today. As we go around the circle to check out, please say one word that describes how you are feeling as you leave the workshop today.

*Tell participants what comes next in your program plan. Review what they might consider as they prepare for your next session.*

## *WORKSHOP 6 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 (focus on goals re: conflict and strategies to enhance cross race relationships)**
  - Opening without thorough processing of discussion guidelines except agreement around confidentiality (reduces by 5 minutes)
  - Complete sections II, IV, V, and VI
  - Eliminate break
- **1 hour 15 min option (focus on goal re: exploration of qualities of cross race relationships)**
  - Complete sections I, II, III, and VI
  - Eliminate break