

Racial Scripts

Witnessing Whiteness Chapter 7 Workshop 7

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, 2nd 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

Racial Scripts

Witnessing Whiteness Chapter 7 Workshop 7

Goals:

- Identify the racial messages we received from family, friends, and society, which ones we have discarded, and which ones we have internalized
- Imagine and develop strategies and approaches to cope with lingering racism and reduce its effects on our lives and relationships

Materials:

- Butcher paper
- Markers
- Pens
- Support request slips (Handout 7.1)

Book Anchor Quote: (Can be read aloud or distributed to the group during opening if desired.)
I can feel the lingering traces of racism in my own body. . . . It's easy to test. Put my white body next to a black body. What do I feel? What reactions kick in, immediately, before I have a chance to think? What facts about race can I feel in my body in that moment? How honest can I be about that? The fact is, I feel something different—a certain kind of fear—next to a black body than I feel next to another white body. The difference matters, still, after years of actively trying to overcome that learned reaction.

—Robert Jensen (2005)

SESSION 8 - Racial Scripts

2 hrs 45 min

Section I

(15 min)

Opening

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

Purpose of piece:

To discuss communication guidelines and review the goals for the workshop

Instructions: *Facilitators introduce themselves, ask participants to say one phrase to capture the feeling they are bringing into the room today.*

- *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.
- Ask participants to silently reread the guidelines and choose one of the guidelines that they want to work on today as they move through the workshop. (Participants may be asked to share their choice with a partner, or this can be a silent, internal process.)

Section II

(15 min)

Messages Received

Materials: None

Purpose of piece:

To identify the racial messages we received from family, friends, and society

Say to Group: To get started today, we are going to start with an exercise done in pairs to explore the various messages we received about race over the course of our lives. These messages might be negative, positive, or neutral. But, the idea is to reflect and explore the range of messages we received.

Count off 1,2 around the circle. The 1's should turn their chairs so that they form an inner circle facing outwards. The 2's should put their chairs in an outer ring facing the 1's – forming pairs.

Say to Group: We are going to ask you three questions. For each question, partner A will have 2 minutes to respond and then the partner B will have 2 minutes to respond. Be sure to listen carefully and stay silent until your partner has finished completely. We will help you know when it's time to switch.

Invite participants to choose who will be partners A and B.

Questions: (approx. 12 minutes, 4 minutes per question)

1. What did you learn from your family about race?
2. What did you learn from your friends about race?
3. What did you learn from society (including media and school) about race?

Wrap Up: We need to acknowledge that some of the messages we received about race may not have been negative toward another group. However, the main point of this short exercise is to remind us that we didn't invent the racism that surrounds us. We have been living with racism all around us since our birth and it is inevitable that we would need to do a lot of work to recover from that exposure.

Section III

(30 min)

Discarded Messages

Materials: Butcher paper posted with race category names, markers

Purpose of piece:

To identify the racial messages received by family, friends, and society that we have discarded

Say to Group: We are now going to do an activity to acknowledge that a good amount of what we learned about race we may already have dismissed.

- There likely have been prejudices and stereotypes that we have discounted and they no longer arise in our thoughts.

- We'd now like to explore those messages that have ALREADY been dismissed. In other words, these are messages that you do NOT currently ascribe to, messages that you have **ALREADY REJECTED**.
- To do this activity we'd like each of you to take a few minutes to consider the various messages you received about each of the racial groups named on the posters on the wall.
- Write the messages that you've already REJECTED.
- To be clear, this activity is NOT asking you to simply write out a long list of stereotypes you've heard in the past. But, this is specifically asking you to name which prejudices or stereotypes you **USED to believe and now REJECT**.
- If you can't think of something to write for any particular group, that is ok.
- As you think about this, some areas to consider can include issues of:
 - Safety
 - Social/economic advancement
 - Relationship/Family
 - Ethics
 - Loyalty

Hang five butcher papers on the wall with the following titles:

White, Black, Asian, Latino, Native-American

Participants write examples on each poster. (10 min)

Once the participants have completed the posters, they should sit back in their seats and volunteers should be asked to read each of the posters in full...one poster at a time. (5 minutes total)

Say to Group: It is likely that just hearing these prejudices and stereotypes raise challenging emotions, even though we are naming only beliefs that we reject.

- It's possible that people will feel targeted as we move through this exercise even if that is not our intent. We need to acknowledge that anger, frustration, and sadness may enter the room as we remind ourselves of the racist messages that have been delivered to us, about us, and/or affect us, on a consistent basis.
- As we move into small groups, let us think about our communication guidelines.
 - Remember to use the "I" voice, speaking of our personal experience.
 - Allow that challenging emotions might arise, but know that we need to do this work.
- Our intention is to support one another in a space of honest sharing so that we can look more deeply within ourselves without being shamed for what we find.
- Especially important is to recognize that our discussion should concentrate primarily on identifying messages we have **rejected** as well as those we are **trying to reject**.
 - This is **not** intended to be a space for us to present statistical arguments or discuss stereotypes we believe are true. This is a space for us to work together to develop strategies for how to understand and disrupt what we believe is **not** true.

After all posters have been read, participants are divided into small groups to consider the following questions:

Small group questions: (15 minutes)

1. Is there anything surprising about these lists? Any places where someone put something on a list that you personally still struggle with?
2. What emotions do these lists bring up?
3. What made it possible for you to reject the prejudices or stereotypes you wrote on the posters? (Contact/exposure to communities? Critical analysis of the message?)

Facilitator's Notes: Depending upon the racial composition of the group and your own needs, grouping can be done randomly by counting off by number in order to develop groups of 4 or 5. Or, you can decide to separate into racially caucused groups. These will be the same groups that continue into the next exercise.

To the degree possible, try to organize groups so that each small group has someone in it that is experienced in race work and can help facilitate a potentially challenging conversation.

Also, be prepared to remind small groups of the intentions of this exercise if someone begins to use statistical or anecdotal information in order to argue FOR a particularly prejudicial or stereotypical view.

Large group popcorn share:

From where they are sitting in small groups, invite participants to share just one word or phrase that captures what they have been taking from the discussion so far.

Wrap Up: The messages we have received are so pervasive that it makes sense that some of them would be released and rejected either immediately or over time.

- Unfortunately, there are some things that we are exposed that just seem to stick in our brains.
- Even if we consciously reject the ideas...somehow we either understand the issues less well or the arguments have been so entrenched in our society that the message has become an internalized script.
- Sometimes it may just be an image that just keeps rising to consciousness even when we recognize that it's a problem.
- We are now going to pay attention to those messages...the ones we are having trouble releasing, the ones that still plague us.

Section IV

(40 min)

Lingering Messages

Materials: Butcher paper with small group questions written out, butcher paper for small groups to take notes, markers

Purpose of piece:

To identify our internalized racial messages, even if consciously recognized as problematic

Say to Group: Sometimes we just can't stop our brains from reminding us about some racist idea.

- For example, many white women immediately think of their safety when coming upon a group of Black young men. Even if the white women consciously reject the stereotype that the men are dangerous, they might still experience a fear reaction even if just for a few moments or seconds.
- These are the types of experiences we are trying to name in the next part of our workshop.
- We want to think about this question: What are all the ways that racist scripts and racial messages have become lodged in our brains, as horrible as they might be, as unwanted as they might be?
- Remember that the point isn't to make us feel like bad people.
- Society has done quite a number on most of us, and this process is meant to give us a chance to name some of the damaging effects living in this society has had on our lives and relationships.

Divide the participants into small groups of 4-5.

Show the participants the questions on butcher paper that they should use to guide their discussion.

Tell them they will have 25 minutes to discuss the questions and will then have some time to share out with the large group (so they should be encouraged to write notes on the butcher paper).

Facilitator's Note: Remind participants that we are NOT trying to solve the issues raised in this discussion. Ask them to concentrate on the four questions posed and try to stay with their feelings (even if they are hard) and not try to use problem solving to get away from naming the effects of these internalized scripts.

Small Group Questions: (25 minutes)

1. What racial messages still live in you even though you want to reject them?
2. When do those ideas come into your mind?
3. How does it feel when it happens?
4. In what ways could the racial messages affect one's life and relationships? How might they affect your life and relationships?

Large Group Share: (15 minutes)

1. What came up during your discussion that you'd like to share?
2. What new information did you learn from the discussion?
3. In what ways is it powerful to name our feelings around these issues?

Wrap Up: Thank participants for taking the risk to share these very difficult thoughts and feelings. It's hard to admit that we are still affected by socialized scripts. So, take a minute or so to validate people's efforts to be honest about the way they have struggled. Try to name some of the main themes you heard arise and let the participants know that in the next section we are going to see how we can help each other work toward releasing racist messages with which we disagree.

BREAK 15 minutes

BREAK 15 minutes

BREAK 15 minutes

BREAK 15 min

Section V

(45 min)

Coping Strategies

Materials: Support request slips (Handout 7.1), same colored pens

Purpose of piece:

To imagine strategies and approaches to cope with lingering racism and reduce its effects on our lives and relationships

Say to Group: Now that we've spent time talking about the various ways that racist messages have gotten embedded in our psyches and continue to affect our lives, we now have an opportunity to support one another so that we are in a better position to challenge the remaining scripts.

- For this last exercise of the day we are going to each name at least one area where we struggle and the group will have an opportunity to brainstorm together how to move forward in ways that increase our vigilance and reduce these scripts' impacts our ourselves and our interactions with others.

Facilitator's Note: Depending upon the group's dynamics, it may be helpful to take a few moments at this time to review the guidelines to help ensure that the group is able to support one another through an exercise that invites them to take significant risk in sharing their needs.

Pass support request slips to each participant (half sheet from Handout 7.1). Each participant should get one, but you can have extras if your group is rather small and you think you can move through more than one per person.

Participants are directed to fill out a slip naming an area of challenge and then crumple up the slip. The group is then invited to throw all the papers into the center circle on the floor.

Once all papers have been thrown in, each participant should be asked go pick one of them up (all at the same time). In this way, all the papers will be able to be read aloud, but no one necessarily knows who wrote out the issue.

Facilitator's Note: *Anonymity will be more likely if facilitator's take care to provide the same color pen, but depending upon how well the group knows one another, it is appropriate to acknowledge that true anonymity may not be possible.*

Participants are asked to go around the circle and read the slip s/he picked up.

Facilitator Note: *The group should be asked to stay attentive to how these issues might be grouped. One facilitator can take notes on butcher paper to try and sort issues as they are mentioned, if desired.*

Once all slips have been read, the group can see the various topics that need to be addressed. Heavily named topics can be discussed first, and then single issues can be treated one by one.

The group works collectively to imagine what could be done to deal with the consequences of the racial message named.

Wrap Up: All of us in our society encounter negative racial messages that are destructive as we live out our daily lives.

- It is so pervasive that it is no wonder that some of this gets entrenched within our minds.
- It's even more understandable that we need to learn more about certain issues in order to fully reject these scripts.
- Hopefully the type of dialogue shared here today can be something that we do more often, admitting where we are struggling in order to receive support and gain ideas for how to better move forward.

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

Instructions: *Thank participants for their honest sharing and supportive statements to one another. Acknowledge that difficult emotion arises around these really hard topics, a lot can be hurtful to hear, and that you value that people stayed in the struggle in order to help people work on these difficult issues.*

Ask participants to check out of the space by going around the room and naming one thing they heard today that they will carry with them, something that was meaningful for them.

WORKSHOP 7 MODIFICATION

Suggested

If you are unable to complete the entire 2hr 45 minute workshop, here are an alteration that could satisfy some goals:

- **2 hour option**
 - Eliminate section III
 - Eliminate break