

Creating Culture

Witnessing Whiteness Chapter 9

Workshop 9.1

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, 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

Creating Culture

Witnessing Whiteness Chapter 9 Workshop 9.1

Goals:

- Describe the dominant white culture in the U.S. today
- Consider our relationship to the dominant white culture
- Imagine what it would look like to create a witnessing culture and how it could be created

Materials:

- Butcher paper
- Markers

Book Anchor Quote:

The goal: Transform the current, dominant form of white culture into an antiracist white culture that regularly names and dismantles racism and white privilege. This work may be started at home, extended into our social lives, and infused into our work settings. This is long-range work. Transforming culture understandably requires much time and collective effort. But, in the midst of our individual struggle, we must simultaneously hold a larger view of our collective role. Yes, we may start this work with a small circle of friends, family, and colleagues. However, our ultimate goal must remain the transformation of white culture overall.

SESSION 10 - Creating Culture

2 hrs 45 min

Section I

(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 and then ask participants to think about the word “culture” and what it means to them.*

Facilitator’s Note: *Participants are likely to enter the space with different working definitions for the word “culture” – For the sake of this workshop you can orient around the following – **Culture refers to the beliefs, attitudes, values, and practices characteristic of a particular group.***

- *As participants to go around the room, ask them to say their name and two words that come up for them when they think of the word “culture”.*
- *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

(40 min)

Dominant White Culture

Materials: Butcher Paper and markers

Purpose of piece:

To describe dominant white culture in the U.S. today

Say to Group: If we are going to consider how to create a witnessing culture that supports anti-racism, we need to take some time to stop and situate ourselves within the culture that exists around us.

- For this reason, we are going to start today by describing what we see as dominant white culture.
- In small groups, we are asking you to first do a brainstorm to consider what dominant culture in the U.S. looks like.
 - In other words, what characterizes the dominant culture we have in this country?
- Then, we'd like you to discuss which aspects of the dominant culture you think are good and which ones you think are problematic in some way.
- Something to keep in mind is that although we want to acknowledge that there are pros and cons to everything, today we are intentionally focusing on those aspects that we consider problematic. We do this not to suggest that everything is negative or bad, but to help us locate areas where our lives and society can improve.
- We'll get back together to share these with the larger group in about 15 minutes.

Facilitator's Note: *It is suggested that each small group include a facilitator or someone who is relatively advanced in their thinking on these issues. Facilitators should help pull out some of the following themes as they brainstorm with their groups: individualism, consumerism, meritocracy as an ideal, superficiality, competition, ambition, productivity, extreme exploitation of labor/resources for profit, etc.*

Small group dialogue (4-5 people in each group) (15 minutes)

1. What does the dominant culture in the US look like? How is it characterized? Create a brainstorm list
2. Which of these aspects do we like and which do we dislike? Create a T-chart

Share out with the large group (15 minutes)

1. Report what you shared
2. What feelings come up as you discuss this? Why?

Dominant white culture sculpture: (10 minutes)

Count off the group by 1 and 2. All the 1's will be part of the dominant culture sculpture. They are to reflect briefly on the conversation we all just had and get together in the middle of the circle (or in front of the group) to enact what kind of physical human sculpture they can create to symbolize dominant white culture as it is.

Facilitator's Note: *If participants need an example --- you might offer that a sculpture representing "unity" could be a circle where everyone is holding hands. Or, a sculpture representing "exploitation" could include one person standing above people (in a controlling stance), while the others are crouched on the ground.*

- As the 1's create the sculpture they can talk amongst themselves to figure out the form that will represent their feelings and ideas. The 2's stay in their seats and observe the creation of the sculpture.

- Once created, the 1's hold their position.
- The facilitator should ask the 2's to state what they see represented.

Wrap Up: Summarize for the group what was discussed, to what degree people find dominant white culture to be problematic or not. Then mention that it is important to explore the various ways dominant culture is reflected in our life patterns.

Section III

(35 min)

White Culture in My World

Materials: Sheets of paper, pens, questions on butcher paper (2 sets)

Purpose of piece:

To consider our relationship to the dominant white culture

Say to Group: For our next exercise we are going to do a combination of personal reflection and pair questioning. There are essentially two aspects to this exercise.

- First, we want to consider how our lives have been influenced by and continue to reflect the dominant white culture we have in the U.S.
- Second, we want to consider the ways that our lives do NOT reflect this culture.
- An important thing to note is that although ALL of us absorb elements of dominant culture in some way, regardless of our racial category,
 - for some people, the dominant culture reinforces their sense of value in the world
 - for others dominant white culture can undercut one's positive experiences.
- So, as we move forward, let us do so knowing that we arrive with varied experiences.

Individual journaling (5 minutes)

1. How does your life reflect dominant white culture in the U.S.?

Structured Pair Questioning (10 minutes)

Partner A answers all three questions first while Partner B listens silently – 1 minute given per question.

Facilitator times the answer periods and reads out questions

Then, Partner B answers all three questions while Partner A listens silently

1. How does your life reflect dominant white culture?
2. How do you feel about these aspects of your life?
3. Are there any aspects that you'd like to see change?

Facilitator's Note: You can instruct participants that if their partner falls silent before the end of the 1 minute period, the partner can prompt deeper and continued thinking by restating the original question.

Individual journaling (5 minutes)

2. How does your life NOT reflect the dominant culture in the U.S.?

Structured Pair Questioning (10 minutes)

Partner A answers all three questions first while Partner B listens silently – 1 minute given per question.

Facilitator times the answer periods and reads out questions

Then, Partner B answers all three questions while Partner A listens silently

1. How does your life NOT reflect dominant culture?
2. What led you to adopt these ways of living?
3. How are these ways of living supportive of or aligned with the idea of creating a witnessing culture?

Wrap Up: The important point of this reflection and sharing process is to acknowledge that all of us have our own very distinct relationship to dominant white culture.

- For some of us, our lives might thoroughly reflect this culture in ways that we both like and don't like.
- On the other hand, there are those of us who either have always felt on the outside of this culture or have moved further and further away over time.
- Only by knowing where we all stand in relation to this can we start to imagine how we might hope things could be different.
- Important to acknowledge is that we will not be able to "fix it all". Believing that we have that kind of power can oftentimes reflect a privileged sense of entitlement that some of us carry wherein we feel that we can simply "fix" things and then move on with our lives.
- A more sustainable and honest approach is to have a goal that includes creating better conditions, dialogue, and fighting the good fight.

BREAK 15 minutes

BREAK 15 minutes

BREAK 15 minutes

BREAK 15 min

Section IV

(40 min)

Summoning our Imagination

Materials: Butcher paper, tape, markers

Purpose of piece:

To imagine what it would look like to create a witnessing culture

Say to Group: One of the most significant barriers to shifting how this country operates is the lack of power many people feel.

- Yet, there is so much power that comes from people getting together and making decisions amongst themselves regarding how they want to live and what they want to value.
- Eventually, when a community of voices becomes strong enough it can and does get noticed and can create real change.
- So, for a while at least, let's try to imagine what we would like to see created if we had the power to start from scratch and create a new culture.

Large group brainstorm (5 minutes)

If there are areas of our culture that we dislike and we believe help perpetuate racism...

- How would we like to see it change?
- What would we like to see our dominant culture in the U.S. look like?
- What values would it hold?

Create a brainstorm list.

Graffiti process: (15 minutes)

What would it look like?

Invite participants to write on separate posters hanging on the wall with the following titles:

Art? Traditions? Interaction Style? Customs?

Read out what was written

Witnessing culture sculpture: (10 minutes)

The 2's now take their turn in the center determining how to physically represent this new culture. Once completed, they hold their position and the 1's state what they see represented.

Large group discussion (10 minutes)

1. What does it feel like to imagine these possibilities? Why?

2. What are the struggles we will face if we try to move toward this vision? (Take notes on butcher paper)
3. What supports can we draw on to help us move toward this vision? (Take notes on butcher paper)

Facilitator's Note: Let participants know that you can type up the ideas written on the butcher paper pages and email them out to the entire group, if desired.

Wrap Up: Reflect back to participants that there is a lot of beauty and possibility when we get together to imagine a new way forward...and acknowledge the challenges that we do face.

- Most importantly, highlight the need to make use of the supports that we identify so that we don't go into this will rose-colored glasses.
- This IS hard work, and we need to both acknowledge it AND plan for how we can stay focused and motivated in the face of resistance and distress.
- We have to remember that our goal is to steadily improve things.
- A sustainable approach includes determining short term goals and prioritizing what we need to do as we work toward our larger goal so that we don't feel that we have to do everything immediately, which is not realistic.

Section V

(20 min)

Closing

Materials: Paper, pens

Purpose of piece:

To imagine how we can start to create a witnessing culture, acknowledge what we did today, and allow people to check out of the space

Instructions: To close out our workshop today we'd like to take a few minutes to do one last reflection.

Journaling: What action steps can we each take that will help us move our communities toward this new way of relating? (5 minutes)

Pair share (2) minutes)

Check out: Name one action step you are able to take to help move us closer to this vision AND how you feel as you leave this workshop today (10 minutes)

Wrap Up: Make linkages for the group of how their action steps might work within the group's action plan (if one was developed from the chapter 9a workshop).

- If there is no concrete plan for continued group participation, suggest strongly that participants find their own small group supports so that this work does not become too individualized.
- It is in community that we find our strength for this work.
- Thank participants for their honest sharing and time.

WORKSHOP 9.1 MODIFICATIONS

Suggested

If you are unable to complete the entire 2 hr 45 min workshop, it would be preferable to simply skip this workshop completely and use the time to ensure that workshops 8 and 9.2 are completed in full.

This workshop is not easily modified, as eliminating any of the three main sections would result in either confusion or the risk of ending without appropriately handling the emotions that this content can generate.